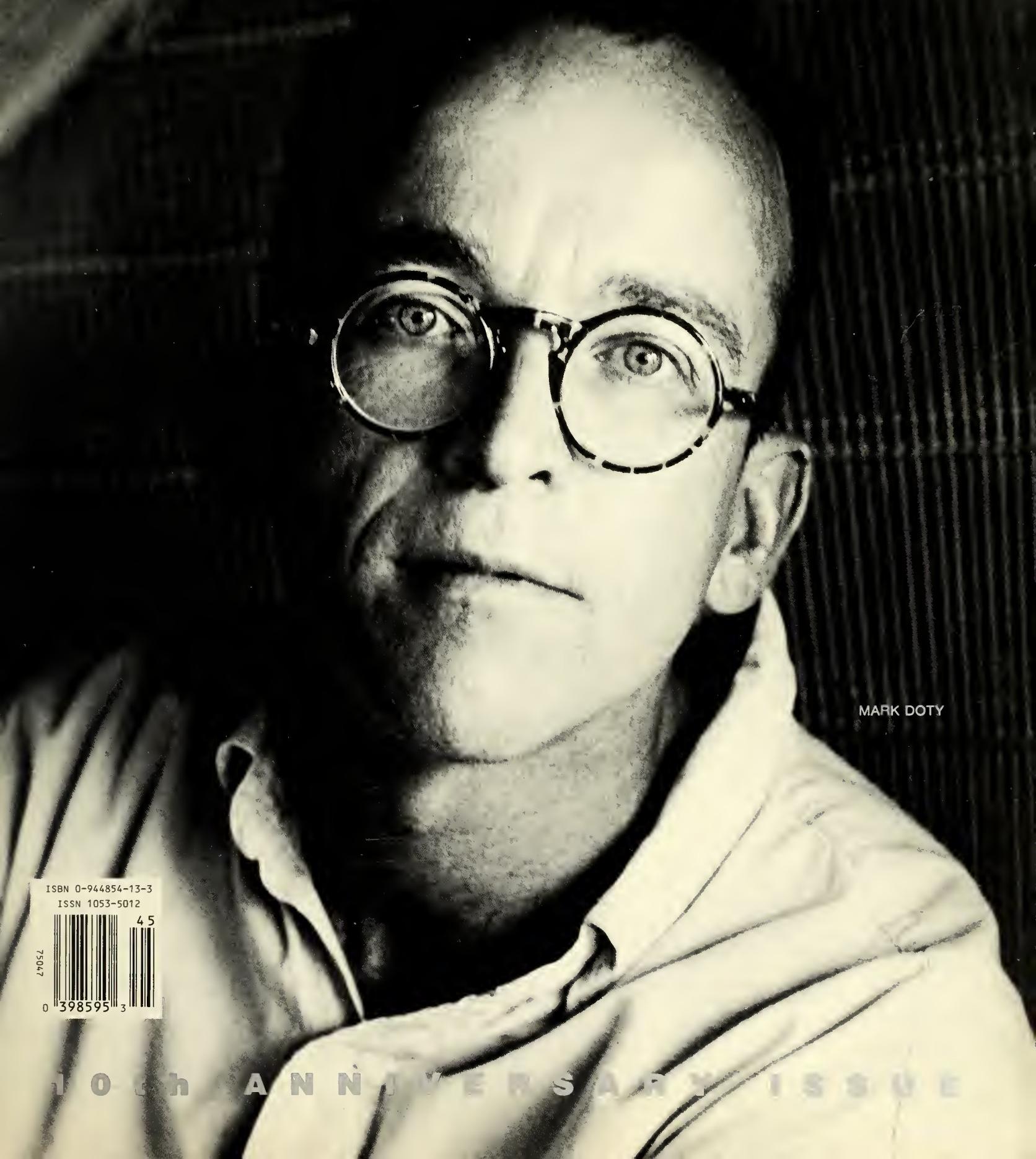


# PROVINCETOWN

A R T S

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MARK DOTY

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## RECENT AWARDS

Susan Mitchell's essay, "Notes Toward a History of Scaffolding," published in *Provincetown Arts* in 1990 was selected for inclusion in *Editor's Choice IV: Essays from the U.S. Small Press 1978-92*, edited by Fred Chappell, to be published this fall.

Both the 1992 and 1993 issues of *Provincetown Arts* received First Place for Editorial Content in the American Literary Magazine Awards.



Candy Jernigan, "Smoke Rings," 1979

pastel, 18" x 24"

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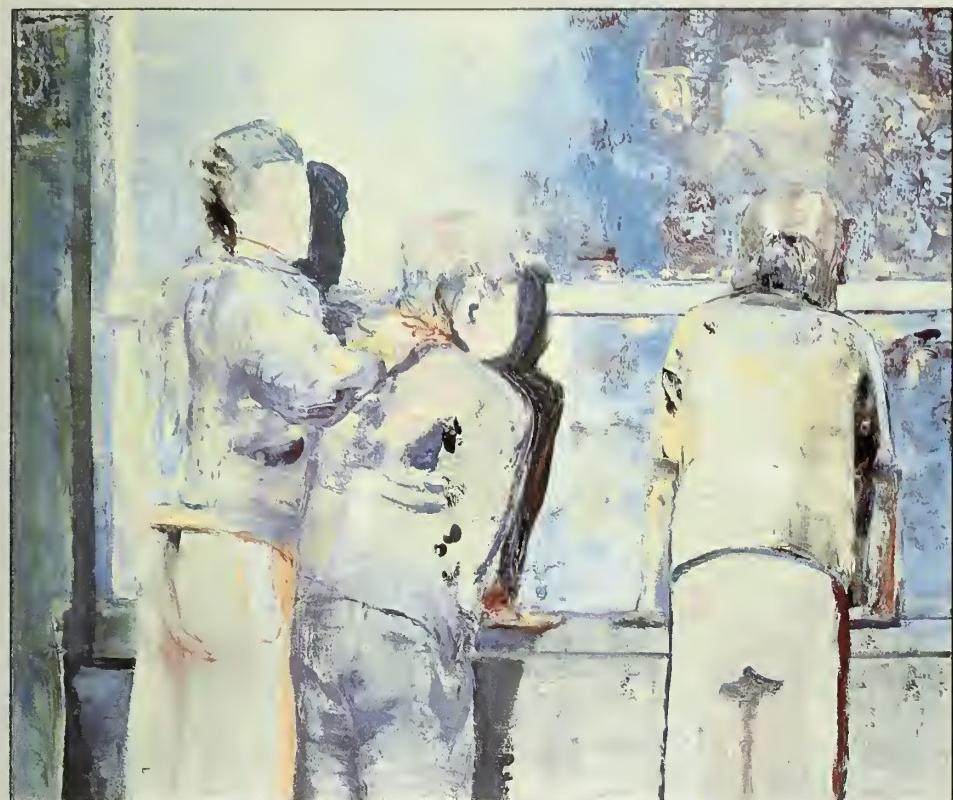
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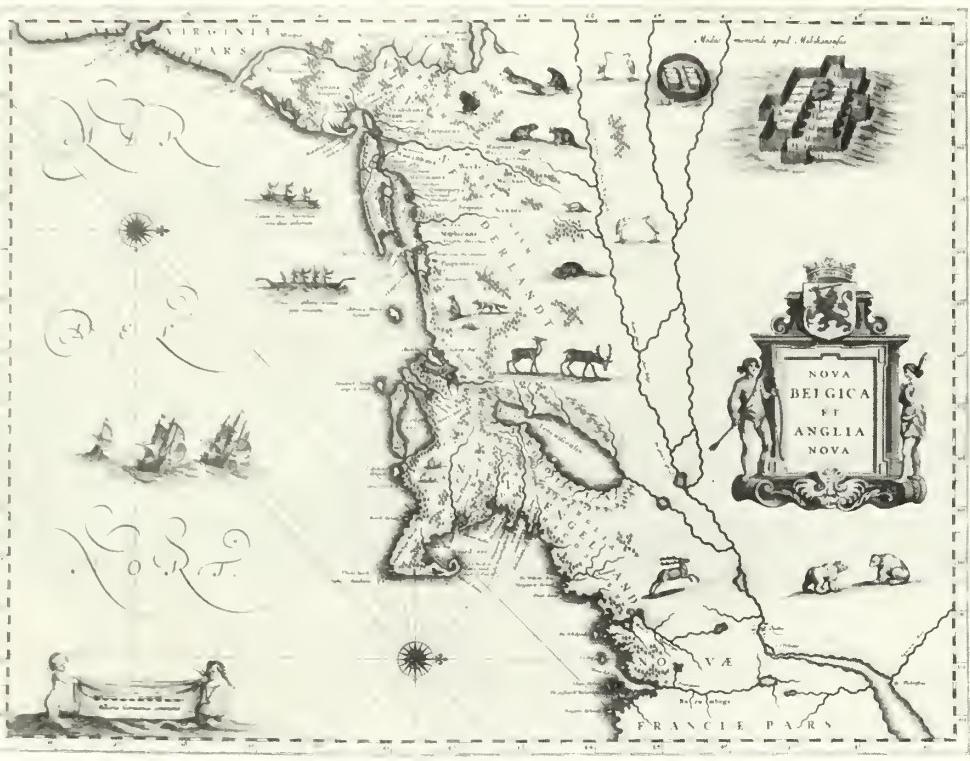
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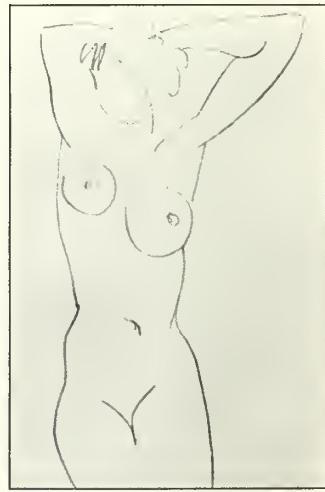
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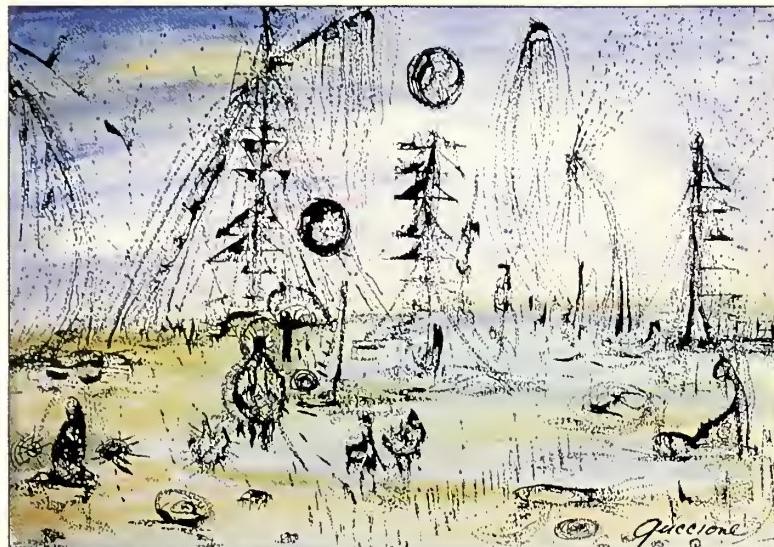
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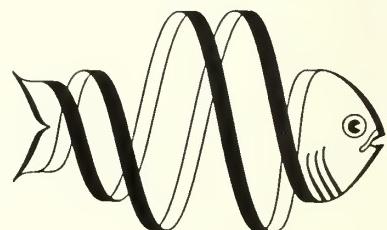
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# The Provincetown AIDS Support Group

serving Cape Cod since 1983



*Photo by Lisa Hull at "Local Flavor," the Tuesday night congregate meal at the Support Group.*

The mission of the Provincetown AIDS Support Group (PASG) is to provide services to persons with HIV/AIDS that maintain and enhance their quality of life and to educate individuals and the community within Barnstable County with timely and accurate information about HIV. These services will be consumer driven and family centered, however family is defined.

The PASG is a community-based organization and we are thankful to be based in a community which has opened its heart to us and those with HIV.

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June 2, 1994

"Three hundred years ago the Pilgrims came to the New World to establish a community of saints. They were not successful in Provincetown. However, others have been more successful and we now have a community of saints, otherwise known as the Provincetown AIDS Support Group.

Before I came to Cape Cod a year ago, I almost died twice of PCP (an AIDS-related pneumonia) and starvation. When I arrived everyone, including my doctor, figured I had three or four days to live. Well, I am still here! But I know that the help and resources that the Support Group has provided have saved my life. I should also thank all the people who have given time and treasure to the Support Group.

The unconditional love I've found here has been like an elixir which has made my life worth living."

—BRUCE D

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PROVINCETOWN AIDS SUPPORT GROUP

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## Letter from the Editor

**T**hat Provincetown Arts has survived 10 years is a tribute to the community, ever evolving, which supports it—the artists and writers who contribute material, the enlightened businesses which purchase advertising, and the readers who value it enough to encourage the editor to persevere through the predictable difficulties of small press publishing. A magazine by its nature is an attempt to define a community, to give shape and specificity to an abstract feeling of something shared. From its beginning as a 24-page tabloid in August, 1985, *Provincetown Arts* has defined itself geographically by the three Lower Cape towns of Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown, but geography, if truth be told, is merely a way of locating and compressing experience.

This year's feature on Mark Doty honors a poet who has named three of his books after places, including most recently the bittersweet *My Alexandria*, published to wide acclaim while his beloved companion, Wally Roberts, was dying of AIDS. "It's strange," Doty says in one poem, "how we say things take place,/ as if occurrence were a location." In another he asks, "Isn't everything so shadowed/ by its own brevity/ we can barely tell the thing/ from its elegy?" Doty's poetry is pervaded by a poignant sense of departure, of passing on from one place to another, as if existence begins with one's transition into a kind of pilgrim.

In a related section called "Places," a series of articles are presented as a loose version of a divine comedy, beginning with a new translation by Robert Pinsky of a canto from Dante's *Inferno*. When Dante toured Hell in the year 1300, he chose a dead poet, Virgil, for his guide, a wise choice, one might assume, since the living poet survived to climb Purgatory and ascend to Heaven. But in Hell the damned, enraged by the poet's privilege, demand to know, "Who is this, who'd go/ Without death through the kingdom of the dead?" The damned in Hell are painfully punished without hope while the souls in Purgatory may become more pure through their suffering. In search of redemption wherever it may materialize, *Provincetown Arts* travels to the marble mountain in Italy where Michelangelo labored for two years cutting blocks from a quarry at the summit, an experience that would become embodied in the sculptor's four *Prisoners*, each with a savage sense of man emerging out of stone.

A contemporary purgatorial action, no less elemental, is made vivid in an eyewitness account of Joseph Beuys's first American visit when, in a healing ritual, the German artist caged himself with a live coyote for five days in a New York gallery. Because the mind is in its own place, *Provincetown Arts* also visits nearby Wellfleet with three pieces suggesting that Wellfleetians honestly believe they live in a kind of Eden, followed by two interviews that hint at the ultimate spirituality of Provincetown where artists and writers, undaunted by the deadly sins of Commercial Street—including shopping, eating, and dancing—come to confront personal demons.

In his collaboration with Robert Pinsky in illustrating Dante's *Inferno*, Michael Mazur chose Provincetown's Pilgrim Monument for his model of a burning tower in Hell. In using a structure constructed in this century to illustrate an earlier poem, Mazur was not being anachronistic since the modern building is a virtual copy of a typical *campanile* in medieval Italy. One imagines that the author of the *Divine Comedy*, no less than Mark Doty, would feel welcome in Provincetown.

—CHRISTOPHER BUSA



The Pilgrim Monument in construction, 1909,  
164 feet above the base

on the left: "Provincetown at Night"  
Photo by Marian Roth





## "That Which Is Left Is Who I Am"

### A Talk with **MARK DOTY**

by Michael Klein

Mark Doty is the author of four books of poetry, *Turtle, Swan, Bethlehem in Broad Daylight*, *My Alexandria*, and the forthcoming *Atlantis*. For the greater part of the last decade, he taught in the MFA Program for Writers at Vermont College and at Sarah Lawrence College. *My Alexandria*, published last year by the University of Illinois Press after being selected by Philip Levine for the National Poetry Series, won the National Book Critic's Circle Award and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award and was nominated for the National Book Award and the Lambda Literary Award. He recently received fellowships from the Ingram Merrill, Rockefeller, and John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundations. This interview took place in the house which Doty purchased in 1990 when he moved to Provincetown with Wally Roberts, his companion of 12 years who died of AIDS this January.

MICHAEL KLEIN: Have poems frightened you?

MARK DOTY: Yes. Over the last five years since Wally tested HIV-positive, poetry has always been a way for me to struggle with what I was feeling—to struggle with naming the condition under which we were living. That was true before, too. The reason I write is to try to figure out my experience by shaping it. The urgency of that struggle was highly underlined for me by Wally's illness. During that time I'd be going along about my business in the outer world, and to return to the desk was to enter into the inner life—enter into the heart, really—which was



often very frightening because it meant facing the reality of losing him. I guess I can't pay enough attention without language. I don't mean the kind of language I'm using now, where I'm talking spontaneously, but language as a made thing. That work of making causes me to look harder, to see if I've said what I really feel. Have I done justice to the world I'm attempting to describe? And I have to look again at what I'm describing. I have to look again at my description and that process of refinement brings me closer. Without writing, I don't know how else I would get there.

MK: Adrienne Rich has an essay in her new book about Thomas McGrath where she talks about him knowing what's going to happen in a poem and you get the feeling that clearly she has some empathy with this idea—that it's OK to know what's going to happen. When I read a poem by Mark Doty, I have the exact opposite feeling—that in the impulse to write the poem is the desire to find what's going to happen.

MD: I don't know what's going to happen and it's out of that not knowing that the poem is written to begin with. Almost every poem begins with some trigger in the world—some originating image—an encounter, usually, which speaks to me in some way, which demands to be written about. But if I know what it has to say to me, if I know how to read it from the beginning, there's really no reason for writing the poem. There's a poem in my second book called "Pharaoh's Daughter." It was triggered by going to a 4th of July parade in Craftsbury, Vermont—a tiny little town—and the parade in this town goes around and around the town green because there's no place else to go, there are no other streets. Wally and I were there watching and a float went by which represented Pharaoh's

daughter. It was wonderfully silly, all these kids from the church youth group dressed up in Egyptian costumes and Pharaoh's daughter bending over the basket, the whole thing lurching and rocking while the truck is going past. I found it funny and I wanted to cry as soon as I saw it. The image wouldn't leave me alone—it insisted upon being looked at—and the poem is the process of unfolding the image. I discovered that it was not only about a childhood memory of that Bible story, hearing that story in Sunday school, but also about a fantasy of wanting to be found by the right parents—wanting to be rescued by the people who would really see you for the miraculous and marvelous child that you were, as opposed to the people who really couldn't see you—your real parents.

MK: This deepening discovery—this being "seen"—is this what writing the poem is like for you?

MD: Writing a poem is for me an act of unfolding. It sometimes feels like an archeological act—there are layers to be uncovered and found. There's some point in the process when I know what the poem is about, when I've discovered where I'm going and sometimes that's maybe two-thirds of the way through. A lot of the poem may exist on the page before I can really see that. Then of course things start to shift or change. I think that all good poems in some way preserve that sense of discovery for the reader—there's something contagious about the way the poem re-enacts it. Even though I'm crafting the poem to make it an experience for you, something like what the experience was for me—even though I am conscious at some point of where it's going—I want to preserve that feeling of not knowing so that the reader can be involved in the journey of that poem. That seems to be one of the hardest things for us to do, to be in our not knowing and stay in our not knowing and pay attention. So many poems stop or don't go far enough and I think that they don't

go far enough because the writer gets to the point where she or he knows a little something more, has discovered a little bit, and quits.

**MK:** You're writing about not knowing about not knowing?

**MD:** I try to stay in the experience. Very often I'm working on a poem and a phrase or an image will come into my head, and I think, that's the end of the poem! But I haven't written my way to the end yet. I find what I have to do when that happens is to try to push on past it, and not accept the easy ending. Of course, like everybody else, I want to get out of that place of difficulty. I don't want to stay there. But maybe what I am thinking of as the end of the poem is actually the middle, maybe it's actually the beginning—where else can I take it?

**MK:** I wonder, what is it about the language that you're using that emulates the state of not knowing—so that it doesn't lose readers or make them think you're in a flat-lining state of thinking without making discoveries?

**MD:** It's important to divide this process into at least two phases, if not more than that. In the first phase where the writer does not know, I have to approach language as tentatively as I can. You know those old nuclear safety movies where you'd see people putting their hands in these enormous gloves through a big plexiglass shield, trying to manipulate something? Well, that's the way language feels to me—you've got these big over-sized gloves that are very clumsy and you're trying to touch something and you don't even know what it is you're trying to touch yet. And therefore you have to try everything. You have to keep trying out phrases—staying unsatisfied—have I got it yet? No, let me try a little more. Letting an unpredictable quality, respecting the slippery peculiarity, the unknowability of language, the unreliability of language—letting that serve you. Work with it, instead of over-controlling it. That's the first stage of the process. Once you have gotten it enough—once the poem starts to seem intact and you know what it is you're speaking about—then I think you absolutely have to take as much responsibility as you can to craft the language, to hone it and shape it so that you're making for the reader an enactment of your own process of discovery. I want to continue to keep that energy of inquiry so that the reader feels like his or her hands are in the gloves, reaching out for something unknown. Suddenly you feel it and you say, I didn't know that's what I was moving towards.

**MK:** And that revelation comes during revision.

**MD:** Which I love to do. I am jealous of artists who have tactile, real materials—fiber and paint—which artists with language don't get to have. We don't have all that stuff—the lovely, sensuous, colorful textures. But there, in revision, it's as if we do. There the language takes on qualities of texture and shape and the way

you need to work with it and hone it emerges. Revision is also much less threatening because you've made the discovery and now you get to have fun. It's the being in the not-knowing state that is so risky because the poem may tell you what you don't want to know, or you may be invited to feel what you'd rather not feel.

**MK:** Although your subject matter changed from book to book, one of the threads in all your work is the making, and then psychic dis-assembling of artifact. Instead of making artifacts objects of the past, you give them the energy of the present. You turn the memory into a discovery of what it is like to be in the present. Logically, it would follow that childhood is a great subject for you.

**MD:** A common thread throughout three and now four quite different books is a sense of the rushing, hurrying flux of time and a desire to find fixed points; a desire to make or encounter a form which will resist loss and erasure. A poem is in itself that kind of artifact, and it reverberates with the energy of the moment in which it was made. It doesn't matter if that poem is an American poem from 1957 or a Chinese poem from 1140 or a sonnet of Shakespeare's from 1602, it has the energy of an individual spirit encountering the huge, unpredictable wash of time and somehow making a point of stillness inside that. Anything which does that has always been of enormous fascination for me: monuments, works of art, vessels of human longing, of human identity, of human memory. I am convinced the story of our lives is one of the artifacts that we all have. There was a point when it was very important for me to try to explain myself to myself in a kind of psychological way. I think that we all have that desire to make the story of our lives. Of our artifacts, it's one that's very fluid because you re-tell the story of your life in each new circumstance. As your life changes you need to understand the story from another perspective. I wrote perhaps

two books about telling myself the story of my life. It was crucial to me. Beginning to view your history as a story is a work of interpretation, a way to wield some power over the past, gain authority over it. Rather than be controlled by my own history, I could say, this is how I will understand what memory is, this is how I will understand my life. At some point I got done with that—for now, anyway. Not to say that I would never write about my family or my childhood again, but I'm pretty sure I will never write about it in the same way because I began to experience a completely different kind of pressure in the present.

**MK:** AIDS started informing the first book you wrote and much of your second book and most of *My Alexandria*. The pressure of AIDS has been constant, ever-present.

**MD:** There are poems in *Bethlehem in Broad Daylight* that are about gay identity and about de-

sire. Those poems come out of a grappling with the present as opposed to looking back and attempting to position oneself in the dynamic of the family. I started to think about what I am inside the dynamic of a culture instead. How does my individual desire align with or contradict the messages of the culture in which I'm embedded? By the time that I started to write the poems in *My Alexandria*, the knowledge of Wally's HIV status created an urgency to make some kind of meaning of a mystery. The image that comes into my mind is one of standing on a sandbar and having this undertow simply eroding the sand out from underneath you. While much was unpredictable, maybe more so than with any other disease, there was a feeling of our future together, which we had both come to view as a kind of given, eroding, being erased, as we stood and watched. When we knew that Wally was HIV-positive but wasn't sick, I experienced this strange combination of an urgency to confront that prospect and the leisure in which to do so. By the time he started to become ill, it was a very different situation that led to a very different life, as well as some different poems.

**MK:** The story of you is becoming a story without you.

**MD:** That's probably a movement many artists experience, moving from the need to get a kind of shape around your own story toward the freedom to look outside oneself. I am no longer compelled to explain the ways in which I was shaped by coming from an alcoholic family, for instance. I just don't need to do that. Which is not to say that the lessons and shaping forces which arise through one's background go away. It has more to do with them becoming the lens through which you see as opposed to the thing at which you are looking. I'm not looking at my childhood any more, but my childhood is an inseparable part of me through which I see everything.

**MK:** In your poems about childhood, and later, there is a tenderness about gay life, a lack of self-deprecation. You put the homosexual in history in a way that is admirable and touching. You've always been out in your poems so it doesn't seem to me that you've used them as a way of coming out. You talked before about poems not going far enough. Do you think the reason you might be so attuned to that particular lapse has to do with being queer and therefore knowing how it feels to test the limits of a culture, translated by the poet into testing the limits of language?

**MD:** The process of writing poems was a very important part of a coming out process. I started to ask, how does *all* my experience—my desire, my fear, my affection—how do those parts of my life that touch upon my sexuality—are fused to my sexuality—how do they get into the work in a way that feels responsible to them? That

pushed the poems to become larger in order to hold more material, to be able to get more of the world in them. Way back in my earlier life when I was in the closet to myself, I wrote poems that were in the closet too and they were poems I have no allegiance to at all. The tough, contradictory, messy material of having a sexual and romantic life, having an identity in a culture that did not welcome that identity, made new demands upon the poems themselves. I also had a desire, early on, not to write a kind of poem which had already been charted out—a poem that reflected gay identity by focusing almost exclusively on sex. The point of difference between gay men and straight men was sexual behavior. So the poetry celebrated that difference. I'm glad that work exists, but once it was done, it didn't seem like there was anyplace else to go with it. My being queer has to do with history, with economics, with how I speak and what I wear. It has to do with what happens to me on the street. It has to do with my job. A poetry that didn't admit every aspect of my life would seem to me too limited.

MK: Your poems have a quality of paying homage to their subject matter.

MD: I've always had an urge to do a kind of redemptive work and I think I use the poem to portray the dignity of its subject. I'm not saying I'm conferring dignity upon the subject. Rather, I point towards elements which might not otherwise be seen.

MK: Your poem "Tiara" manages to dignify someone who might otherwise seem plain.

MD: "Tiara" is an elegy for a friend of mine who was a drag queen, always out in clubs. Especially when he wasn't dressed, there was an uncelebrated quality to his life. After he died someone said at his wake, "Well, he asked for it." I was filled with rage at that ridiculous notion that we invite our own oppression as a consequence of pleasure. It was one of the few poems in which I actually did know what I wanted to say.

MK: What you do in that poem, which is what Tony Kushner does with the Roy Cohn character in *Angels in America*, is not make the bad guy—that insulting mourner at the wake—merely the bad guy. You give him a certain credit by taking what he said and turning it into the poem's great question, the epiphany: "what could any of us ever do/ but ask for it?"

MD: The smaller poem ultimately would be the one that dwelled in my anger at the speaker. The larger possibility is that there's a kind of redemptive re-evaluation or revisioning. To say, well, there is a way in which we ask for it! We love the world! We want to have sex! We de-

sire beauty! We love whatever it is that we love. That line is about an enormous risk. If we don't take that risk we never extend ourselves. I have written poems about people who have very little or who are in very extreme situations—very marginalized drag queens, homeless people, naive artists—in part because those people are teachers for me. They have so little support from the armatures or masks of a more conventional life that a kind of spiritual life, otherwise invisible, shines through.

MK: That happens in your poem "Playland." The drag queen is ennobled through her failure.

MD: "Playland" is the bar in Boston and the drag queen in this poem is really not being very successful in creating her illusion. But there's some way in which out of the materials of the toughest life, a work of art is being made. I find that enormously beautiful and inspiring. There's another poem called "Valley of the Moon" about an old man in Tucson who had made a kind of work of outdoor art—grottos made out of cement and broken dishes and Disney figurines—all kinds of things that he had assembled into a kind of "fairyland," he called it. I met him when I was a teenager. He would lead children on these little magic tours which would culminate in a trip to the enchanted garden "high in the valley of the moon" where we were invited to focus our thoughts whenever we were troubled. We could be uplifted by astrally-projecting ourselves to the garden of the moon.

And tis man, who was dressed all in black and a long black veil, really didn't live in my parents' world. He didn't exist. He was so far out on the edge, and he had made a universe, and not only had he made it, but he invited other people into it. He had re-shaped the terms of the world in which he lived. If writing poetry is a sort of quest for spiritual value and for points of dignity and points of grace, then these characters have been real teachers for me, the ones who've helped me in that process.

MK: It's true, your poems create a kind of parallel universe.

MD: There's a poem in *My Alexandria* in which there's a homeless poet named Ezekiel who recites his poems on a train in Manhattan. A stanza of his is quoted in the poem, I think exactly, although it's from memory so I'm not sure. Here's an example of someone making with those four or five lines a very coherent vision of the world, as well as a redemptive vision. Then he gives it out to other people on the subway for free. That made me feel humbled, awed at what was possible when it seems we have so few materials, so little—that so much can be made and then given out with such generosity.

MK: Do you see different impulses in your new book?

MD: Well, I have just more or less finished a manuscript—"more or less" because I think these poems are substantively done, though I still find myself going back and doing lapidary work, sanding and polishing and shifting things around to see what happens. But I feel the architecture of the poems and the book—*Atlantis*—is there. The poems were written between the time Wally and I moved to Provincetown in the fall of 1990—at the same time you did—and just before his death this January. Among a lot of different things, the poems are very involved with trying to see Provincetown physically and psychically, as the inner and outer place in which I have been living. The working title for this manuscript was "Coastal Studies," which didn't feel quite right, but is still in the back of my mind since it's a book about being on the coast between land and water, between living and dying, between now and forever, between here and there. How do we love a world that is always hurrying away from us? How do we love what we will inevitably lose? Love is a contract with loss. A friend of mine said, "a dog is a pact with grief." You don't get to sign on for the joy without signing on for grief, right?

MK: Place, it seems, is what grounds you.

MD: These are poems about being in a place saturated with light, beauty, possibility, grace, and being there during a time of feeling an intensifying pressure of potential loss. Things become so inter-mingled as to be inseparable. I guess that's still about the attempt to locate grace, but the poems feel different to me. Who knows how readers will see them.

MK: You've named three books after places, but they're more than places, aren't they?

MD: Bethlehem is a location of redemption, a point on the psychic map where one can be redeemed or resurrected, review or revise one's life. I chose the title because the poems are attempting to find that possibility in the ordinary, harsh, uncompromising world. Alexandria comes from Cavafy's poems. His city was Alexandria in northern Egypt, which was for him the great museum of memory and of desire. He has a wonderful poem called, I think, "The Old Neighborhood," where he talks about walking down a street and realizing that he's transformed everything into feeling: the houses, the street-corners, all of it, so that places, in fact, become oneself and become so involved in one's history that one can't separate time and space, one can't separate memory and space. Bachelard said somewhere, "space contains compressed time—that is what space is for," a typically French presumption, but it's a pretty interesting theory. Cavafy, too, saw Alexandria as a continuum and not only as a city where he had his moments of pleasure. I think he experienced

**My being queer has to do with history, with economics, with how I speak and what I wear. It has to do with what happens to me on the street. It has to do with my job. A poetry that didn't admit every aspect of my life would seem to me too limited.**

himself as much in historical time as in the exact chronological span of his life. He could write these poems about the 1st century A.D. which sound as if they're being remembered, as something that happened to the speaker in the poem. So there's a sense of the poet coming to contain a history—as you put it, to make a universe. It becomes a fixture on the map. Cavafy is long dead, but the Cavafian world is available for us to enter. He shows up in so many of my poems because I find myself in moments that have been defined for me by the way that Cavafy could see. We could say this experience is Cavafian—it has the resonance given to it, lent to it, by a work of art. A work of art has taught us to see it. Alexandria, for me, is that city of art—that made place, which is both the given and the way that we transform the given.

**MK:** Were there models for you when you started writing about Provincetown—poets who you read to discover landscape?

**MD:** When I started to feel compelled to write about this landscape, to write about Provincetown, I turned to poets who were teaching me how to see the coast. One of them certainly was Elizabeth Bishop who has written the great poems of the North Atlantic shore. Poems like "At the Fish Houses" which see New England and Nova Scotia with a very particular, careful regard, for instance. "The End of March" is a great poem about walking on Duxbury beach. Her ability to describe what she was seeing, but through description to portray the self and to portray feeling, was enormously important to me because I felt like I had written a lot of poems talking about myself directly. There were parts of my experience that I couldn't get at that way, that had to be approached through metaphor or through submerging the self into the landscape.

**MK:** Which I think goes back to the issue of autobiography we talked about, and the urge to move beyond autobiography.

**MD:** Yes, after we've met ourselves directly, we have to meet ourselves through other things. We need vehicles in order to encounter who and what we are. And when we go out into the marsh, it's partly the marsh that we're going to see, but isn't it also ourselves in that world and how a different mirror gives us back to ourselves? Bishop was helping me to think about that. Marianne Moore also is a poet of exact, beautiful, quirky descriptions, of poems that are stubbornly language as well as portraits of the world. They're poems that are always reminding us they're poems. Those were the models that were floating around for me and influencing me. The title, *Atlantis*, suggests a place which is lost beneath the waves but which is at the same time a permanent city, a fixed world. It is both lost and remembered at once. I'm not sure I have finished unpacking that metaphor intellectually, but I feel that the poems explore a

number of underwater places. In particular, Atlantis is the salt marsh, the moors at the west end of Commercial Street. It's a major presence in this book, a location which vanishes twice a day as it goes under the tide and then is revealed to us once again. Something about that alternation of being visible and invisible feels very related to the way that I experience time. The past is submerged and then reappears, the future is hidden and then is revealed. The present is sometimes to me like that: that steely sheet of water covers the marsh and it's hard to see the present, but what the present obscures is the future.

**MK:** This notion of the present—obscuring the future while describing it—reminds me of a poem in *My Alexandria*, "Fog." How did it occur to you to make the world of the dead available in that poem?

**MD:** I was absolutely compelled. The poem began pretty much at the place where it begins on the page. A couple of weeks after Wally and I had taken the HIV test I was working in my garden in Vermont and cut my finger with the garden shears. Blood came welling out and I found myself compelled and horrified by the sight of my own blood, of course because of the kind of knowledge and information which blood was about to provide. I felt a sense of things happening within our bodies—the blood being that part of us that the poem says "has no outside." We can't see it without taking it out of its element. I feared something was happening that we could not know. We had an enormous sense of dread about what that might mean. The poem didn't get committed to paper until after we had learned the results of the test, but all of the elements were being juggled in that period of time. The poem doesn't make a discovery. It's a breathless, compelled recounting of a set of events and awful facts. I could have written that poem with simply the test, or the blood and the test, and leave out the world that surrounds the people in the poem—leave out the garden, the Ouija board, the television screen, all the things going on. But I think it's a poem about putting dreadful knowledge in the context of a life. The devastation exists inside the context of an individual, a couple, and even the culture that's around those people—the things that they do and think about. The experience is given more of its completeness by having more of a life around it.

**MK:** In other poems you start at A, go around the world, and come back to A. This poem stays on one plane.

**MD:** Right, it doesn't go and talk about Egypt or literature or whatever. It stays right in the experience.

**MK:** Did that feel like a great departure for you, or was it that the nature of the experience dictated a less dialectic poem?

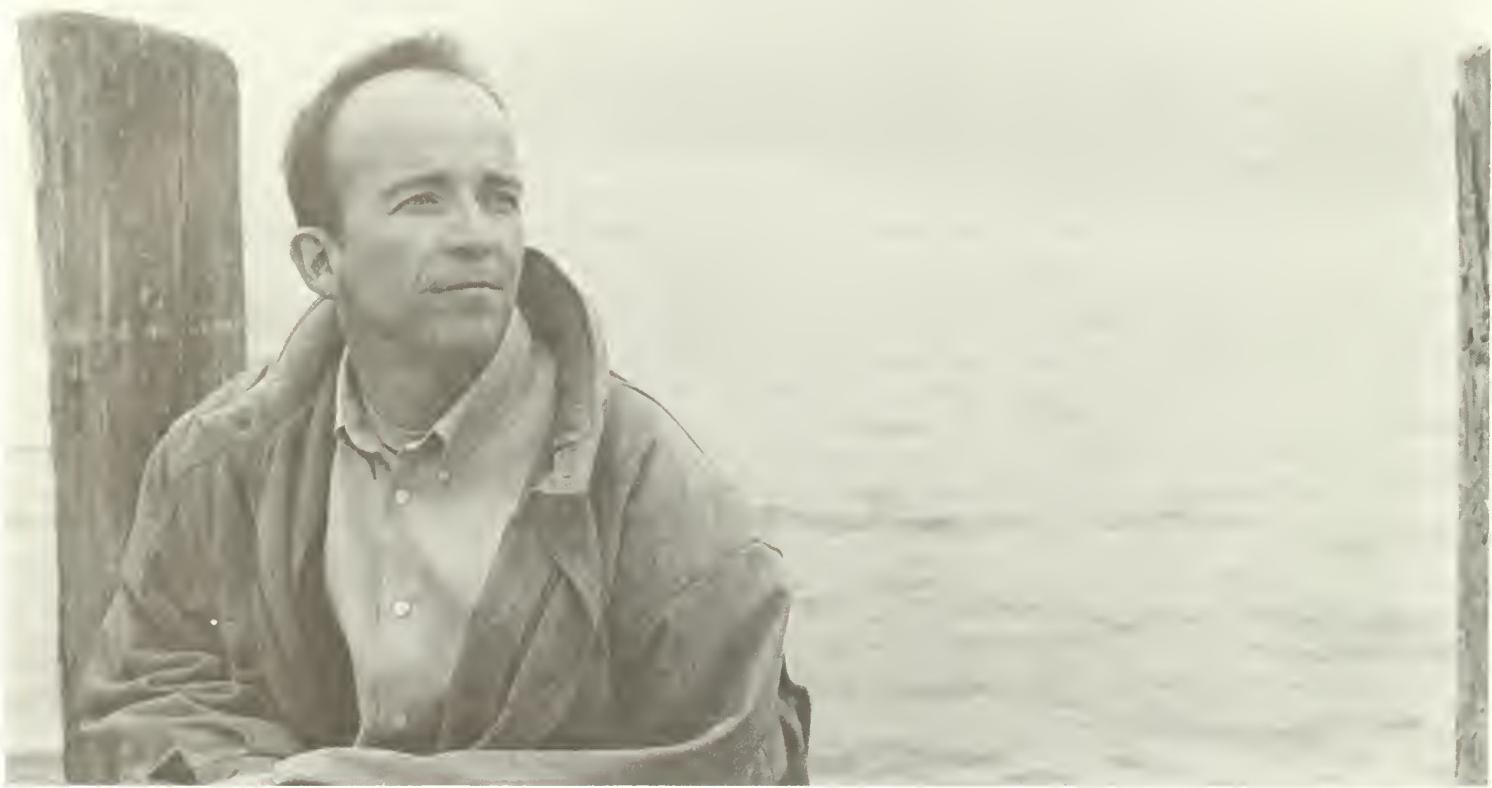
**MD:** I think it's being true to, or mimetic of the

experience. It's a three-week period and you're waiting for these test results, so you try to involve yourself in your life. But in fact all you can think about is what is approaching and it seems like it's never going to happen and then it happens. In this case, it turns out to be dreadful. There is no escape from that experience and the poem ends on trying to resist it—to say any other word than the word "positive"—please, let me say something else—and knowing that that's impossible.

**MK:** Sarah Schulman said that AIDS is difficult to write about because we are finding out how to write about it at the same time. For you, has AIDS changed as a writing subject?

**MD:** Of course the first thing that happened is that it shifted from *being* a subject. An early poem about AIDS, "Turtle, Swan," is basically about reading these terrible stories in the newspaper and feeling like this could happen in my life, my lover could have AIDS. I wrote that poem in 1984 and now it seems darkly prescient. It was a subject in a sense of something I apprehended at a distance. Gradually, it moved closer in, when I found myself writing elegies for friends or acquaintances. The real shift happened when it became not a subject for me, but a part of my subjectivity, a part of my daily life. To the point that I began to see AIDS almost not as a thing in itself. Is AIDS a thing? It means so much to me that it's not even a word, that it's an acronym and therefore has a larger negative capability, as Keats put it. We can imagine into it because the word is this vague shifting bunch of letters that stand for something scientific. I think people are therefore even more able to pack their own meanings and terms into it. And of course, how we define it individually and culturally keeps shifting and developing. For me, it began to feel like the great intensifier—that whatever the epidemic touched became more itself. And that was true for people with AIDS, whose lives were raised to the umpteenth power, so they became more intensely whoever it was they were to begin with, and for everybody else around them. My own fears, insecurities, what I loved, what mattered to me—all of that was so clarified and pushed by being present with Wally in his illness and that continued I think with greater intensity over the course of nearly five years. I was not necessarily writing poems about AIDS, but if I was writing a poem about the breakwater or about the colors of the boats at Flyer's Boatyard, there was a necessity, an urgency about being able to see; about being able to name experience to try to get it right; to think about what it means to love what is passing; to think about what it means to be temporary. That's true for everybody. We're all going to die. But having the sword which hangs above us all become that much lower and more visible changes everything completely.

*Continued to page 131*



MARK DOTY, Photo: Renate Ponsold, 1994

## Sweet Chariot

by Mark Doty

I GREW UP in two religions. The first one—comforting, strange, rigorous, in its way—was comprised of an astonishing and lovely set of images.

It was a religion given to me primarily by my grandmother, a Fundamentalist Christian from East Tennessee whose faith had the kind of solidity and rock-depth upon which Jesus must have intended to found his church. *She* was Peter's rock, unshakable, holding us all up—or at least holding me up; I was too small to have much of a sense of what she meant to my parents or to her husband, my cantankerous and difficult grandfather who outlived her by 20 years. My memories of her are very particular ones: a day out behind our house when she and I picked dandelion and poke greens, and the sunlight filtered through the thin flowered rayon

dress she wore—this would have been 1957 or '58—and she showed me the right leaves to pick for the greens she'd boil with fatback to serve with the chicken she'd plucked and set to roast in a black graniteware pan sparked with a whole firmament of stars. In that house, where she and my grandfather lived with us, their room was a secret source of depth and meaning. I didn't like him much but I liked his things: a drawer full of beautiful useless old fountain pens with marbled cases, cigar boxes full of rubber bands, stuff saved for the day it would surely be needed. I loved her with all my heart, and everything that was hers: the green rocking chair, a fruitcake tin filled with swirled peppermint candies, the Bible with the words of Jesus printed in red, like holidays on a calendar. She would set me up on her lap and, rocking all the while, read Bible verses to me; I'm not sure if I remember especially her readings from Revelations or if it simply feels to me now, whenever I hear someone mention a phrase like "last days" or "apocalypse," that the scent of her, lavender and peppermint and clean old dresses, and the texture of her clothes and the Bible's leatherette

cover and onionskin pages are forever commingled with those words; some essence of her imbues them. It was she who presented me with my first religion, which was the religion of images, and they were given to me in Bible verses and in the songs we'd sing on the porch swing, summer nights: the sweet chariot coming to carry us home, the moon turning to blood, the angels sounding the trump so that all the dead would clap hands and arise, the thin veil of this world—thin as her sprig-scattered skirt!—parting at last and opening into a world we need not fear, though it would be awesome, a world made true and just and bright and eternally resonant as the songs we sang.

I loved the word *chariot*. I couldn't sing it without thinking of the cherries in my uncle's orchard, which I'd seen once, and where my father had lifted me up into the branches so that I could pick the half-ripe fruit. Sweet chariot, sweet cherries, gold and red and green, a kind of glowing flush like heat on the skin of the little fruit, which was smooth and cleft and satisfying on the tongue as the word: *chariot*. This was the way the images invited us to dream

Sweet chariot,  
sweet cherries,  
gold and red and  
green, a kind of  
glowing flush like  
heat on the skin  
of the little fruit,  
which was  
smooth and cleft  
and satisfying on  
the tongue  
as the word:  
*chariot.*

into them.

I don't think I had any awareness of the second religion, the codes of explanation and prohibition, until after her death. I was five. She died of a heart attack, throwing her bedroom window open and gasping for air. I remember most vividly being wrapped in a quilt, one she'd made, I imagine. I watched TV very early in the morning, at an hour when I wasn't usually awake, and saw the minister come in his black jacket and collar, his odd flowery scent. And then gladiolus around her coffin, and again that sweet essence of peppermint and lavender, and little ribbons decorating the flowers on her grave. I dreamed that she came to see me, in the night, and stood beside a cane chair in a circle of lamplight to speak to me—very softly and intimately and comfortingly, and importantly, though I haven't any memory at all of what she said.

My understanding of a more worldly religion began after that. One Sunday there was a sermon especially for children—I believe this was in a Presbyterian church in Nashville, or perhaps in Memphis, that we attended then—instead of the usual Sunday School Bible stories accompanied by big colored pictures. (What were they? I want to say chromolithographs, or engravings, perhaps because the pictures and their sense of the world, an ancient and quaint exoticism they portrayed, seems so firmly of the 19th century). This Sunday, no Baby Moses in the Bulrushes or Joseph in His Coat of Many Colors. Instead, the minister told us a story about the terrible dangers of desire.

A little girl's mother had baked a particularly beautiful pie, and set the pie on the dining table to cool, saying to her daughter, "Make sure that you do not touch this pie." The girl thought about this, and tried not to touch the impossibly attractive pie. But after a time, overcome by her longing, she simply could not resist any more, and she decided that if she snatched—that was the word he used, snatched (a particularly pinched, ratlike little word, it seems to me now, full of disdain and pettiness)—just one little piece it would be all right. So she did, taking the little bit of pie into the closet and eating it

in the dark where no one could see her. The morsel eaten, she was still filled with hunger; the pie was so good, she wanted it so badly. So she would snitch just one more little piece, and eat it in the dark surrounded by the scratchy and comforting wool of her parents' coats. But of course that didn't satisfy her either; once a contract with appetite had been entered into, there wasn't any turning back. And standing in the dark, her hands and lips covered with the evidence of her need, the little girl felt, suddenly, seen. She was watched and she knew it, and so she turned her face upwards into the dark from which that sense of witness came, and there, floating above her, was the eye of God: enormous, missing nothing, utterly implacable.

My parents told me that when we came home after this sermon, I hid under my bed and wouldn't come out. I don't remember that now, but I do remember inventing a new game, which I used to play alone, since my sister was 10 years older and I might as well have been an only child. We lived that year in a big old farmhouse on a horse farm we rented. The horses used to wander around about their own business—nameless, cared for by others. In my new game I marked off some portion of the yard by the abandoned chicken coop and named it Hell, and I'd play devil, racing about the perimeter with my pitchfork, poking at souls, meting out punishments, keeping them in line. With a girl who lived down our road I'd play a game in which we took turns dying and going to heaven, which I imagined as a kind of garden with a maze, a rose garden, in which I would meet a blonde and milky Jesus. *I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses...* But that game, which was soon forbidden to us by a relative who said, "You mustn't play that, it might come true," was a game of images, of peace and stillness. My game of hell was an enactment of energy and ferocity, of power and defiance. I think I have responded to the religion of prohibition in this way ever since.

Perhaps if my grandmother had lived, and if we'd stayed in Tennessee, my two religions would have merged, and I would have grown away from the images I was originally given, or felt oppressed by them. But because I was split off from that world, the landscape of my childhood and of the songs seems permanent to me, sealed, untouchable, a mythic landscape of

hymns, with their rivers and flowers, their cherry trees and blood and moons. We moved away from my parents' families, on to suburbs in Arizona and Southern California and Florida, and into a succession of increasingly polite Protestant churches which finally sort of evaporated into a bland social gesture which was easily set aside. My mother, late in her life, found a religion of imagery again in an Anglican church so high and so influenced by the architecture and pageantry of Mexican catholicism as to be a kind of spiritual theater. I came, after a while, to seek the images of comfort and challenge and transformation in art. My mother, with her love of painting and music and beauty, had helped me to look there, but I think I understand intuitively that there was no sustenance for me in the religion of explanation and prohibition.

The explanations were never good ones—the world as trial by fire, proving ground to earn God's love or His forgiveness for having been human—and it was apparent to me even at an early age that the notion that anyone around me actually *understood* God's will or could articulate it was patently ridiculous. There's a wonderful line in Charles Finney's quirky book, *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, which I read as a kid, a kind of Americanized version of a speech of Hamlet's: "There are more things in heaven and earth, madam, than even a lifetime of experience in Abalone, Arizona, could avail you of."

The prohibitions were worse than the explanations. They suggested that the divinity had constructed the earth as a kind of spiritual minefield, a chutes and ladders game of snares and traps and seductions, all of them fueled by the engines of our longing; the flames of hell were stoked by human heats. As if desire were our enemy, instead of the ineradicable force that binds us to the world.

I CANNOT BE queer in church, though I've tried, and though I live now in a place where this seems to be perfectly possible for a great many people. Here in Provincetown we have a wonderful Unitarian church, with a congregation largely gay and lesbian, and it pains me a bit to have to admit that when I have gone to services there I have been utterly, hopelessly bored. There's something about the absence of imagery, an oddly flaccid quality of neutrality in the language of worship. I long for a kind of spiritual intensity, a passion, though I can certainly see all the errors and horrors spiritual passions have wrought. I don't know what I want in a church, finally; I think the truth is that I *don't* want a church. My friend Phil has sweetly and politely informed me that it's a spiritual experience for him to be in the company of his fellows, worshipping together at the U.U., and that my resistance to it is really a sort of

aesthetic snobbery, a resistance to its public language and marriage of spirituality and social life. I don't want to judge anyone's way of finding a soulful commonality, but nothing puts me less in mind of ultimate things than the friendly meetings held within my local church's square jaw-boned New England architecture and flourishes of trompe l'oeil.

Perhaps my discomfort has to do, still, with issues of desire. Our wind, our glimmering watery horizon and sun, the watchful seals and a face full of snow seem to me to have far more to do with the life of my spirit. And there is somehow in the grand scale of dune and marsh and sea room for all of human longing, placed firmly in context by the larger world: small, our flames are, though to us raging, essential. There is something so *polite* about our Sunday gatherings of tolerant Unitarians that I feel like longing and need must be set aside. I am certain that the part of us that desires, that loves, that longs for encounter and connection—physical and psychic and every other way—is also the part of us that knows something about God. The divine, in this world, is all dressed up in mortal clothes, and longing and mortality are so profoundly intertwined as to be, finally, entirely inseparable.

My lover of 12 years died just last month. It astonishes me to write that sentence. It astonishes me that I am writing at all; I have not, till now, and I didn't know when the ability to focus might come back to me. I haven't yet been able to read, and there are many other things I haven't even begun to approach yet, in the face of this still unbelievable absence. I will be sorting out and naming the things I learned from Wally for years to come, probably for the rest of my life, but here is one thing I know now.

All the last year of Wally's life, he didn't stop wanting. He was unable to walk, since some kind of insidious viral infection which his useless doctors didn't seem to know the first thing about gradually took away his ability to control his body. But he wasn't ever one of those people who let go. Oh he did, in the sense of accepting what was happening to him, in the sense of not grasping on to what he couldn't have, but he lived so firmly in his desires. From the bed where he lived all that year he'd look out onto the street at anything in pants walking by and be fully, appreciatively *interested*. I never for a minute felt hurt by this or left out; it wasn't about me. It was about Wally's way of loving the world. I think in his situation I would have been consumed by frustration and a sense of thwarted desire, but he wasn't. Because his desire wasn't about possession, and his inabil-

We can say we take a part of something but we may just as accurately say we take part *in* something; we are implicated in another being, which is always the beginning of wisdom, isn't it—that involvement which enlarges us, which engages the heart, which takes us out of the routine limitations of self?

their little dog, since they felt they couldn't take care of him.

Wally talked and talked about this and it became clear, in a bit, that what he really wanted was for Dino to come to live with us. The day that I went to Manhattan to pick him up Jimmy and Tony changed their minds; they weren't ready to let him go. Wally was so disappointed that I went to the animal shelter with the intention of finding a cuddly little dog who'd sleep with him and lick his face. What I found was a three-year-old golden retriever with enormous energy, a huge tongue, and a phenomenal spirit of pleasure and enjoyment. He didn't just lick Wally's face, he bathed his head, and Wally would scrunch up his face and then grin like he'd been given the earth's brightest treasure.

Sometimes late at night he'd tell me about other animals he wanted to adopt: some lizard, a talking bird, a little rat, fish.

I don't know many men who'd want a new dog, a new pact with domestic life, with responsibility, with caring for the abandoned, in the final weeks of their lives. There's a Polaroid I took of Wally, with golden Beau curled up and sleeping in our rented hospital bed beside him. He could barely use his hands then—our friend Darren and I would feed him, and give him drinks to sip through a straw—but he's reaching over with his beautiful hardly functional hand to stroke Beau's neck. That is how I will always see my love: reaching toward a world he cannot hold and loving it no less, not a stroke less.

Desire I think has less to do with possession than with participation, the will to involve oneself in the body of the world, in the principle of things expressing itself in splendid specificity, a

ity to fulfill it wasn't an issue; it was to be in a state of wanting, to be still desiring beauty and grace and sexiness and joy. It was the wanting itself that mattered.

A couple of months before Wally died we heard about a couple in the city, one of whom was ill, who needed to give up



handful of images: a lover's irreplaceable body, the roil and shimmer of sea overshot with sunlight, a handful of cherries, the texture and weight of a word. The word that seems most apt is *partake*; it comes from Middle English, literally from the notion of being a part-taker, one who participates. We can say we take a part of something but we may just as accurately say we take part *in* something; we are implicated in another being, which is always the beginning of wisdom, isn't it—that involvement which enlarges us, which engages the heart, which takes us out of the routine limitations of self?

The codes and laws fall away, useless, foolish, finally, hollow little husks of vanity.

The images sustain.

The images allow for desire, allow room for us—even require us—to complete them, to dream our way into them. I believe with all my heart that when the chariot came for him, green and gold and rose, a band of angels swung wide out over the great flanks of the sea, bearing him up over the path of light the sun

makes on the face of the waters.

I believe my love is in the Jordan, which is deep and wide and welcoming, though it scours us oh so deeply. And when he gets to the other side, I know he will be dressed in the robes of comfort and gladness, his forehead will be anointed with spices, and he will sing—joyful—into the future, and back toward the darkness of this world. ■

MARK DOTY AND WALLY ROBERTS, Photo: Gray Day

This essay will appear in the anthology, *Wrestling with the Angel: Gay Men Write about Religion*, forthcoming from Putman in 1994. Mark Doty's own collection of essays is forthcoming from HarperCollins.

## A Note on Dante's Inferno, Canto VIII

by Robert Pinsky

**C**anto VIII begins with the nearly obscured beacon of a distant flame, and ends with a different, perhaps equally remote, mysterious hope. In between these two moments of tentative vision, the action of the canto is driven by anger.

First, the angry greeting of the sinister boatman Phlegyas is answered by Virgil's correction, sullenly accepted by Phlegyas, who in classical mythology burned down the temple of Apollo in his rage. Then, in the middle of the crossing, the pilgrim's boat is attacked by the raging, mud-coated shade of Filippo Argenti, rising from the dark waters in horror-movie style. The exchange between Argenti (so named by the citizens of Florence because in his time of power he was arrogant enough to have his horse shod with silver) and the two poets is a shocking transaction: violent, hateful, and full of desire to hurt on both sides. Virgil congratulates Dante, embraces him and actually kisses him on the face in delighted approval for the fury Dante has shown towards Argenti.

The difference between this righteous anger and the sin of anger for which Argenti has been damned—a distinction in danger of lapsing into the merely theoretical—gains force from a series of physical actions. Argenti grabs at the boat with both hands; Virgil thrusts him off; Virgil embraces Dante; the “people of the mud” mangle Argenti; Argenti bites at himself in impotent rage. This last action suggests the self-destructive nature of sinful anger.

But it is an earlier physical action, observed with almost delicate precision, that helps guide us through these verdicts of wrath. When only the shade of Phlegyas and Virgil are in the ferryman's boat, “it bobbed without a sign/ of being laden” until it carries Dante's weight—because he is a living creature, with dimension and physical presence, while the other two are doomed spirits, who cannot weigh down the boat at all.

It is in Canto VIII that we first see Virgil's limitations and vulnerability: unbaptized, without hope, he cannot enter the gate before the pilgrims without outside help. He becomes discouraged, and with Dante's rage we see the first outward intimation that as a Christian Dante can hope to pass Virgil—as Virgil has predicted Dante would do—and proceed through Hell and Purgatory to Paradise. The confidence that grows in the pilgrim Dante as he pursues his journey, like the weight that presses the boat down into the water, is a sign that he can hope to prevail: a signal that is in a sense immediate and close at hand, though in other ways it can feel as remote and obscure as the distant beacon.

Righteous anger, in other words, is distinguished from the sin of anger because it is active, part of a living quest. For Dante here, anger has a purpose, and appears as a form of courage: the opposite of the despair that makes the shade of Argenti bite at himself, or that makes Phlegyas obey muttering. The contest in Canto VIII is between courage and despair, and between kinds of reality. Dante's struggle against the nightmare hands of Argenti, grappling from the mud, is the struggle of life against the vague, defeated gestures of menacing shadows.

A FEW WORDS about form. In his verse, too, Dante is concerned with the action of embodiment, and with different kinds of physical and spiritual reality. Verse itself is a kind of body, a technology that deploys the physical character of words to heighten their force of spirit. The body Dante invented for his *Commedia* is *terza rima*, an interlocking pattern of rhymes in which the middle line of each three-line stanza rhymes with the framing first and third lines of the next: aba bcb cdc ded, etc.

This pattern is no mere ornament. It provides Dante with a unique combination of onward flow and conclusiveness, a surging forward of narrative as one rhyme reaches ahead and a clinching, epigrammatic feeling as another completes itself. At every moment in the poem these two kinds of movement, the pushing forward and the arriving, have different kinds and degrees of force.

How can a translator into English imitate some of that movement, which depends upon triple rhymes? Italian is rich in rhymes, English poor. One kind of solution has been to abandon the pattern altogether, or to relax it. Another kind of translation has struggled to maintain the pattern, pressuring the natural vocabulary and word order of English to produce triple rhymes.

In this translation, I have tried to preserve the pattern, while also respecting the nature of English vocabulary and word order, by relaxing the definition of rhyme. The translation treats words ending with like consonant sounds as rhyming, no matter how much their vowels may vary. Thus, in the first lines of this canto we have “time/flame” and “base/these/face.” And in the concluding lines, “before/bore/sure” and “pass/us,” as Virgil addresses Dante:

*This insolence of theirs is nothing new;  
At a less secret gate they've shown it before,  
One still unbolted and open, as you know:*

*You read the deadly inscription that it bore.  
Already on this side of it—down the steep pass  
Passing the circles without an escort—be sure*

*Someone is coming to open the city to us.”*

In these few lines Virgil refers back to the gates into Hell, through which the two poets have passed, and which still bear the marks of Jesus's breaking them open. He also refers ahead to the messenger who will come to help them. The narrative is rapid, yet some lines have an inscribed quality: “You read the deadly inscription that it bore,” and “Someone is coming to open the city to us.” Somewhere in that overlay of motion and inscription is the effect of art that has made the *terza rima* worth striving to render. ■

**ROBERT PINSKY** is the author of several collections of poetry, including *The Want Bone* and *History of My Heart*. His new translation of Dante's *Inferno*, illustrated with 36 monotypes by Michael Mazur, will be published this fall by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

# INFERNO CANTO VIII

Translation by Robert Pinsky

Continuing, I tell how for some time  
Before we reached the lofty tower's base  
Our eyes were following two points of flame

Visible at the top; and answering these  
Another returned the signal, so far away  
The eye could barely catch it. I turned to face

My sea of knowledge and said, "O master, say:  
What does this beacon mean? And the other fire—  
What answer does it signal? And who are they

Who set it there?" He said: "It should be clear:  
Over these fetid waves, you can perceive  
What is expected—if this atmosphere

Of marsh fumes doesn't hide it." Bow never drove  
Arrow through air so quickly as then came  
Skimming across the water a little skiff

Guided by a single boatman at the helm:  
"Now, evil soul," he cried out, "you are caught!"  
"Phlegyas, Phlegyas—you roar in vain this time,"

My lord responded. "You'll have us in your boat  
Only as long as it takes to cross the fen."  
Like one convinced that he has been the butt

Of gross deception, and bursting to complain,  
Phlegyas held his wrath. We boarded the boat,  
My leader first—it bobbed without a sign

Of being laden until it carried my weight.  
As soon as we embarked, the ancient prow  
Turned swiftly from shore; it made a deeper cut

Into the water than it was wont to do  
With others. In the dead channel one rose abeam  
Coated with mud, and addressed me: "Who are you,

To come here before your time?" And I to him:  
"Though I am here, I have not come to remain—"  
Then added, "Who are you, who have become

So brutally foul?" "You see me: I am one  
Who weeps," he answered. And I to him, "In weeping  
And sorrow remain, cursed soul—for I have seen



MICHAEL MAZUR, "CANTO VIII," 1992  
monotype, 23 3/4 x 15 3/4"

Through all that filth: I know you!" He started gripping  
With both hands at the boat. My master stood  
And thrust him back off, saying, "Back to safekeeping

Among the other dogs." And then my guide  
Embraced my neck and kissed me on the face  
And said, "Indignant soul, blessed indeed

Is she who bore you. Arrogant in his vice  
Was that one when he lived. No goodness whatever  
Adorning his memory, his shade is furious.

In the world above, how many a self-deceiver  
Now counting himself a mighty king will sprawl  
Swinelike amid the mire when life is over,

Leaving behind a name that men revile."  
And I said, "Master, truly I should like  
To see that spirit pickled in this swill,

Before we've made our way across the lake."  
And he to me, "Before we see the shore,  
You will be satisfied, for what you seek

Is fitting." After a little, I saw him endure  
Fierce mangling by the people of the mud—  
A sight I give God thanks and praises for:

"Come get Filippo Argenti!" they all cried,  
And crazed with rage the Florentine spirit bit  
At his own body. Let no more be said

Of him, but that we left him still beset;  
New cries of lamentation reached my ear,  
And I leaned forward to peer intently out.

My kindly master said, "A city draws near  
Whose name is Dis, of solemn citizenry  
And mighty garrison." I: "Already clear

Are mosques—I see them there within the valley,  
Baked red as though just taken from the fire."  
And he, "It is fire blazing eternally

Inside of them that makes them so appear  
Within this nether Hell." We had progressed  
Into the deep-dug moats that circle near

The walls of that bleak city, which seemed cast  
Of solid iron; we journeyed on, to complete  
An immense circuit before we reached at last

A place where the boatman shouted, "Now get out!  
Here is the entrance." Above the gates I saw  
More than a thousand of those whom Heaven had spat

Like rain, all raging: "Who is this, who'd go  
Without death through the kingdom of the dead?"  
And my wise master made a sign, to show

That he desired to speak with them aside.  
And then they tempered their gross disdain a bit,  
Answering: "You, by yourself, may come inside;

But let that other depart, who dares set foot  
Within this kingdom. Let him retrace alone  
His foolish way—try if he can!—and let

You remain here, who have guided such a one  
Over terrain so dark." You judge, O reader,  
If I did not lose heart, or believe then,

Hearing that cursed voice, that I would never  
Return from there. "O my dear guide," I said,  
"Who has restored my confidence seven times over,

And drawn me out of peril—stay at my side,  
Do not desert me now like this, undone.  
If we can go no farther, let us instead

Retrace our steps together." That nobleman  
Who led me there then told me, "Do not fear:  
None can deprive us of the passage One

Has willed for us to have. Wait for me here  
And feed your spirit hope and comfort: remember,  
I won't abandon you in this nether sphere."

So he goes away and leaves me, the gentle father,  
While I remain in doubt, with yes and no  
Vying in my head. What they discussed together

Or what my guide proposed, I do not know,  
For they were out of hearing. Before much time,  
The demons scrambled back, where we would go—

And then I saw our adversaries slam  
The portals of the entrance in the face  
Of my master, who remained outside and came

Back to me walking slowly, with downcast eyes.  
His brow devoid of confidence, he said:  
"Who has denied me this abode of sighs?"

And then he said to me, "Don't be dismayed  
By my vexation: I will conquer this crew,  
However they contrive to block our road.

This insolence of theirs is nothing new;  
At a less secret gate they've shown it before,  
One still unbolted and open, as you know:

You read the deadly inscription that it bore.  
Already on this side of it—down the steep pass,  
Passing the circles without an escort—be sure

Someone is coming to open the city to us."

—DANTE ALIGHIERI

by Michael Mazur

## Dante's *Inferno*: Illustrated in Provincetown

**O**ne chilly April night in Provincetown, with my wife and a good crowd from our small community, I listened to our friend, Robert Pinsky, read his poems at the Fine Arts Work Center's Kunitz Common Room. Toward the end of the evening Robert read a startling new translation of Canto XXVIII of Dante's *Inferno*:

No barrel staved-in  
And missing its endpiece ever gaped open as wide  
As the man I saw split open from his chin

Down to the farting-place, and from the splayed  
Trunk the spilled entrails dangled between his thighs.  
I saw his organs, and the sack that makes the bread

We swallow turn to shit. (XXVIII 22-28)

His translation, read with his particularly precise enunciation—each word a controlled explosion—was direct and powerful. I listened with growing excitement, memories flooding back of my experience reading this great poem during a year in Italy, my first as an artist. Walking home that evening, I felt the urge, strengthening with each step, to work with those images. Over the town rose the Pilgrim Monument, a reminder of the tower I'd seen every day in Florence 37 years ago. For moments, the present seemed to merge with the past.

In 1957, when I was 21, I moved to Florence to test my desire to be an artist. Could I live alone every day, would I wake each morning inspired to work? Could I sustain, over the year I'd taken off from college, the passion for the life I'd just begun to imagine?

From the day I arrived, I loved Italy, and Florence in particular. I took a sixth-floor apartment on the Via della Terme, a few blocks from the Piazza della Signoria and the Uffizi galleries. A small balcony of my apartment gave me a view of the famous city hall tower constructed about the time when Dante, in exile, began to write the *Divine Comedy*. I could see a slice of the yellow Arno, his *bel Fiume* (XXIII 95), crossed by its bridge, newly renovated in Dante's time with side saddles of little shops and named the Ponte Vecchio or "old bridge" 700 years ago.

In that oldest part of town, life often seemed unconnected to the 20th century. Early mornings, nearly alone, I'd walk down the rain-slicked Por Santa Maria toward the Ponte Vecchio. It was impossible not to imagine late medieval Florence, the Florence Dante could have recognized. On my way to the Academia di Belli Arte, where I drew from the model, I would pass the Casa di Dante, said to be his birthplace, then the Batistery—*My Fair San Giovanni* (XIX 16)—where he broke the baptismal font, or so he writes, *To save one drowning there* (XIX 18). Throughout the old city I'd seen plaques on buildings with quotations from the *Commedia*: his spirit was everywhere.

As my Italian improved, I began to read the *Commedia*. When I returned to the States for my senior year, I began to study it. I played with the idea of illustrating the *Inferno* for my thesis, to make a printed and illustrated book. I soon realized that was far too ambitious a project for the few months until my deadline.

I thought again of the *Inferno* in 1968. Six years of work based on life in a mental hospital, plus the war in Vietnam and the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, had profoundly affected the way I looked at the world. For an anti-war portfolio, I made an etching based on Canto XII, the first ring of the Seventh Circle, where men, violent toward other men, fight submerged in a river of blood. I made several drawings and etchings which were never finished. Over the years Dante was never very far from my mind. I pondered and collected illustrated editions and wondered, as my work developed, what my own *Inferno* might look like.

That night two years ago when I heard Pinsky read his translation, I knew I'd rediscovered the *Inferno* at an important time in my own development: the opportunity was at hand to do something I had wanted to do for all these years. Robert had decided just recently to translate the entire *Inferno* and agreed to work with me as illustrator. Two years earlier, I had made a monotype for the cover of Pinsky's most recent book of poems, *The Want Boue*. We began to work in tandem, he sending me translations, I making images for them.

Although I began by making drawings for the book, I soon moved to monotypes, a medium I've loved since I first saw the exhibition of Degas' monotypes at the Fogg Museum in Cambridge in 1968.

(A monotype is a unique print—almost a contradiction in terms. I paint on a clear unetched metal plate and develop my images using brushes, rollers, rags, and often, my palm and fingers. The plate is run through the press once only, but sometimes a second impression is taken, a "ghost" of the remaining inked image, called a cognate. Lighter and more delicate, it can either stand on its own or take additions. No image can be repeated, but one impression leads to the next in a procedure more fluid than other print processes.)

DANTE'S poem is a protean allegory, hideous and sublime, topical and universal, confronting the grand design of human weakness in all its complexity. Those of us who illustrate the poem bring to it our own historical context, our stylistic bias and the limits and variety of our own experience. I wanted images that would enhance the visceral power of the language or at least not distract from it. I chose to keep the images as simple and powerful as possible. Moreover, there are formal relationships between one canto and the next that I have wanted to use. Where Dante contrasts the dead air of Limbo (Canto IV) with the turbulence of the Second Circle of the Lustful (Canto V), for instance, I have tried to embody the change by emphasizing the flatness of the former and the turbulent space of the latter.

Dante plays two roles in the *Inferno*. As author, he is omniscient; as pilgrim, he knows only what he is told or shown by Virgil, his guide. As readers, we know first what the pilgrim understands and only later what the author is telling us. Since my images and their captions introduce each canto, I have tried to be careful not to give away the narrative too soon.

Because I wanted a first-person response, not the distanced third-person, I decided not to depict Dante or Virgil in my images. That is to say, I wanted "I see," not "they saw."

Our Canto VIII begins:

*Continuing, I tell how for some time  
Before we reached the lofty tower's base  
Our eyes were following two points of flame*

*Visible at the top; and answering these  
Another returned the signal, so far away  
The eye could barely catch it. (VIII 1-6)*

Dante sets the stage for his entrance into the Fifth Circle where Wrathful and Sullen souls flail and sink in the muddy river Styx. The signals of flame are a call to the boatman Phlegyas who transports Virgil and Dante to the walls of the city of Dis rising above the Stygian slime. On the way across, a scornful soul, Fillipo Argenti, one of Dante's enemies, tries to scuttle their boat. I chose not to illustrate that confrontation, but to show the tower in the first stanza, drawing a line of memory and correspondence between Dante's time and place and my own. This, after all, is characteristic of Dante's method when he shows us that what we see in Hell, though strange and disorienting, differs only by degree from what we experience in the world above. Dante wants us to understand the nature of a sin through his metaphor for its punishment: he makes this real to his reader by references to familiar people and places.

ITALY is evoked for me every time I look out my studio window in Provincetown across the harbor at the Pilgrim Monument. It's a memorial to the Pilgrims—not unlike Dante's—who landed here and who must have journeyed through a hell of their own to what they hoped would be a paradise (although, during the late 19th century, some residents called it "Helltown").

The ideas for many of the illustrations occurred over the seven months it took to complete the work, the images coming unpredictably from life and art. One interpretation would cancel out another, only to be resolved by some serendipitous discovery—a book picked up at random or some aspect of landscape, for instance, the way a tree damaged by Hurricane Bob became the model for the thornbush of the suicides: *The leaves not green, earth-hued;/ The boughs not smooth, knotted and crooked-forked;/ No fruit but poisoned thorns* (XIII 3-5).

I like to think Dante himself may have worked the same way: that the tower he envisioned was the one that was being built to aggrandize the same city government that banished him into exile, or that the *thornbush of its wounding shade* (XIII 102) might have been modeled on one that bruised him on his travels. The blood that drips from the broken branch might have been his own. ■

A traveling exhibition of MICHAEL MAZUR'S *Inferno* monotypes will originate this September at the University of California at Berkeley and continue to the University of Iowa Museum of Art and to Boston University Art Gallery.



MICHAEL MAZUR, "Wood of the Suicides," 1992  
monotype, 23 3/4 x 15 3/4"

by Natalie Edgar

## Michelangelo's Purgatory



Michelangelo's Cave, Altissimo, Italy



GUSTAVE DORÉ, "Dante's Purgatory"

**U**nder contract to Leo X, a Medici Pope, to produce 28 sculptures for the facade of the cathedral of San Lorenzo in his beloved Florence, Michelangelo closed up his house in Rome in 1517 and moved to Carrara where there was an experienced marble industry. The mines and quarries were ancient, dating before Christ. Trails leading down into gorges of loose, scrap stone were Dante's model for sites in Purgatory, that marble mountain where souls are purified through suffering. The psychology of the quarries is at one with the amount of human labor and agony they extracted over the centuries. In every square inch of cut marble, one feels and knows the awful truth about Collonata, a quarry started by the Romans in the first century and worked by lines of chained slaves, columns of slaves, hence Collonata. Today the mountain that was Collonata is gone, and its absence is in the air you breathe.

The Duke of Carrara, so eager to entertain Michelangelo while he shopped for marble, let him occupy the rooms where Dante lived during his exile. The town, jubilant at the economic opportunity, is said to have welcomed him "as though he were the Christ arriving on a donkey from Galilei." Michelangelo roamed the quarries of Carrara seeking unflawed white marble. He marked and coded the selected blocks, made drawings, and assigned them to a position in the facade. Then, in a sinister turn, the Vatican abruptly ordered him to stop all work in Carrara and to use marble coming instead from the newly-acquired Medici mountains near Pietrasanta.

A short distance away, separated only by a ridge, the Pietrasanta site was undeveloped and *statuario* marble with a rare warmish tint lay untouched in huge strains near the summits. The Medici, undertaking the challenge, used Michelangelo for their purposes.

For the next two years, from 1518 to 1520, Michelangelo hardly produced any sculpture. Instead he served as captain of a marble industry, and often he lived like a worker and slept in a hut near the summit of Mt. Altissimo. In September, 1518, he wrote to an assistant saying that the road was almost completed except for some tunnels to be dug out, a large boulder sitting across the road, and a few places that needed to be leveled with a pick. Seven months later he declared that the stoneworkers he had brought from Florence knew nothing about marble, nor quarrying big blocks, nor splitting them at the tricky veins. Lowering a column Michelangelo had hewn out himself, one worker had his neck broken when the supporting ring snapped. The column smashed into chunks and small pieces. "All of us who were around came close to losing our lives," Michelangelo wrote, "and furthermore a lovely column was lost."

Michelangelo continued to labor with good humor and the persistence of Sisyphus until January, 1520, when the Medici, suddenly, abruptly, canceled the San Lorenzo contract. The divine sculptor wrote back bitterly to Pope Leo's most trusted cardinal:

*I do not reckon the period of three years wasted in this work; I do not reckon the great insult put on me by being brought here to do the work and then have it taken away from me; and for what reason I have not yet learned. I do not reckon my house in Rome which I left, and where marbles, furniture, and blocked-out statues have suffered upwards of 500 ducats. Not taking into account the above things, of 2300 ducats only 500 remain in my possession. Now this is the agreement: let Pope Leo take over the quarry I started with the mentioned marbles that have been excavated, and I will keep the money I have left. Furthermore, I will be completely free.*

It is a little known fact that during these lost years Michelangelo began the sketches for his most startlingly expressive sculptural group, exploding with anti-classical distortions, the four *Prisoners* or *Prigioni*. (*Prigione* means "jail.") Following his death the sculpture fell into the hands of Cosimo de Medici, whom Michelangelo hated. No doubt spitefully, the figures were buried halfway into the walls of the Duke's ugly grotto fantasy in the Boboli Gardens in Florence, where, in his crazy thinking they made wonderful garden deities emerging from trompe l'oeil foliage, part of a bucolic tableau with lascivious village idiots and a cart and a donkey. During the 18th century the grotto became a titillating setting for love trysts. For 300 years the great estheticians, the great art historians, and the great connoisseurs did not see Michelangelo's masterpieces as worthy to be shown in a museum. They could not see what it meant that Michelangelo allowed to remain the evidence of the rhythms of the chisel—ferocious cuts made with the bull chisel and delicate crosshatching made with the tooth chisel.

The *Prisoners*, worked on in Florence over three years after Michelangelo left Pietrasanta, were presented to the della Rovere family, the heirs of Pope Julius II, in fulfillment of an earlier commission for a large sculptural group for Julius's tomb. They were out of proportion to figures already presented—a head taller. The Moses would have to be discarded if this group were used. And the rough finish was strange. Michelangelo became ensnared in a legal suit which dogged him to his death. The rejected sculptures sat unrevised for 40 years in his studio, despite the fact that he was not adverse to recycling orphaned sculptures.

Jagged ribs of raw marble erupt in the *terribilita* of his modeling, and the original quarrymen, battling the 10-foot blocks under the watchful eye of the five-foot-five sculptor, may be the ghost models for distortions caused by great strain. Are they finished masterpieces, as Rodin

declared, or were they abandoned and forever poised in a transitional state of becoming? Are they expressions of repressed sexual urges, as has been argued, or do they represent his disgust with demands to finish huge, Herculean commissions? In 1905, after centuries of neglect, the sculptures were dislodged from the wall of cement and clamshells and placed in the Accademia in the same hall as the *David*, the classical ideal, where the artist's hand is concealed in the continuous arabesques of smoothly finished surfaces. In contrast, the *Prisoners* appear so fresh as to be bewildering. The modernist revolution, with its emphasis on touch and primitive expression, had prepared the way to accept so-called unfinished work as direct experience.

Summer after summer, my husband and I hiked through the mountains and quarries of Pietrasanta, trekking over trails that Michelangelo made, pitched steadily at 20 degrees. Here and there the original paving stones from 500 years ago show through the upper layers of riprap. Even today these are not dead roads. Most of the quarries from that era are still operating. The Mt. Altissimo that Michelangelo saw is still a mesmerizing sight. Its marble face, a vertical rampart almost a mile high, creased by forces of energy from the time of creation, looks youthful. At the summit two parallel ridges spin out, welcoming the sea with open arms and enclosing the valley of Altissimo. At night, the nude mountain, bare of vegetation, glows like solid silver and can be seen for miles out on the Mediterranean.

I discovered a distant and dark spot up on the summit of Mt. Altissimo and was surprised to learn it was Michelangelo's cave. I realized how simply the four torsos were connected to the mountains where the marble was obtained. Each is an amazing transformation from man to mountain. Clouds rising over Altissimo's ridge reappear in the "Awakening Prisoner" with a misty veil of crosshatch obscuring the face. In the "Young Prisoner" the elbow shielding the face has the breathtaking scale of a mountain. "Atlas" is a mountain giving birth to a man. Captive in the eternal geometry of an enormous block, the torso is twistingly alive. In all four the back and forth skirmish between mountains, mist, and clouds, continuous in the Apian Alps, is enacted in the play of light on the marble's rough and smooth surfaces. Himself a captive of his own classicism, Michelangelo, inspired by sheer physical ordeal in Pietrasanta, transcended limits of time and place and became a 20th century artist of raw distortions. ■

NATALIE EDGAR, a painter and a former contributor to *Art News*, is married to the sculptor and stonemason Philip Pavia.





## Joseph Beuys's Coyote: An American Action

Text and Photographs by Stephen Aiken

**J**oseph Beuys came into my awareness in 1972 after I saw his first one-person exhibition in America at the Harcus-Krakow Gallery in Boston. I became familiar with some of the elements of his art: the sleds, the felt suits, the fat and the flashlights, and the little Swiss crosses colored the red brown of dried blood. My first impression was that these were somehow sanctified objects, the cherished vestments of a lost tribe of the avant-garde, relics of some forgotten cult of modernism. Beuys had fought on the Russian front as a dive bomber pilot for the Luftwaffe. Returning from a mission, he crashed in the Crimea. A mythology now surrounds the story of his rescue by nomadic Tartars. Beuys suffered serious head wounds and was blinded temporarily. At some point he was smeared with fat and blanketed with felt to preserve his body heat. Swaddled and anointed, the man who emerged from this trial would maintain a lifelong attachment to those materials associated with his rescue.

In opposition to the Vietnam War, Beuys had refused invitations to visit the U.S. He was also increasingly reluctant to let his activities be regulated and confined by the mechanisms of the

art world. When at last he did visit in New York in 1974, he ignored traditional artists' venues and appeared in public dialogues at educational institutions, except for one exhibition of "invisible sculpture" which consisted of an empty room at the Ronald Feldman Gallery. I attended a dialogue at the New School for Social Research—his long-awaited American debut. There was a kinetic excitement in the air, a full house with an overflow crowd banging on the doors to get in. Patiently responding to the ruckus of a wild range of questions, Beuys illustrated his ideas with chalk on blackboard. I took a few photographs, impressed by his ability to calm the multitude.

Four months later Beuys returned to America with a singular intent. Directly upon his arrival from Germany, bundled in felt, blindfolded and strapped to a stretcher, he had himself delivered via white ambulance to the Rene Block Gallery. He remained there for five days, caged with a live coyote known as Little John. At the end, he reversed the manner of his arrival and returned home. This action he titled, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*.

I walked into the gallery almost by accident. A glimpse of the event sent me home for my camera. I returned to the gallery, spent an hour,

and made a single contact sheet of photographs. Beuys wore his usual uniform—a rumpled felt hat, outdoorsman's vest, boots, and jeans. He carried a few tools of his oeuvre—a cane, flashlight, felt, and a triangular chime hooked to his vest. Fifty copies of the *Wall Street Journal* were delivered daily, along with a pile of hay. Heavy steel mesh gates separated the space for visitors from the much larger space where the action unfolded. Beuys had delayed the action for a few days until an original metal fence was replaced with a more imposing barrier, indicating the importance Beuys placed in these gates, which reveal *Coyote* to be a prison story. Periodically, the sound of a pre-recorded turbine machine blasted from speakers in the gallery, interrupting the call of the wild with a grating dissonance, a monstrous urban shriek.

The beauty of *Coyote* was in the harmonious truce that formed between man and animal, a peaceable kingdom with its own rhythms of activity and rest, pacing and waiting. Long moments of downtime passed, with Beuys smoking a cigarette, the coyote curling up into the felt, its eyes nodding off near the flashlight. There were sublime moments looking out a sunny window together. There were dramatic moments with Beuys cowling himself like a

**For his brief incarceration  
in a New York gallery,  
Joseph Beuys chose for his  
cellmate the greatest escape  
artist in the American  
animal kingdom.**

monk with the hook of his cane held high, repeating penitential bows while Little John, with the rapt attention of an anxious acolyte, growled and prowled around him. And there were moments of secular comedy when Beuys would sweetly twang his Pavlovian triangle while the coyote urinated on the *Wall Street Journal*, which carried a desperate account that week of the upgrading by the FBI of Patty Hearst to the "armed and extremely dangerous" category or a report about President Nixon who is said to be "at peace with his decision not to quit." Beuys, punning on the meaning of the verb, to mark, connects the markings of artists on paper with the habit of animals to mark their territory with droppings and urine. Later, the soiled newspapers, with their intricate lists of financial quotations, were bound, signed, and sold, proving the Beuysian axiom that capital equals art.

Beuys believed that the real capital of human beings was our capacity to generate ideas. Thinking itself became a form of sculpture and every human being became an artist. Although he produced a vast array of works, he viewed the art object as a secondary consequence of the primacy of his ideas. An action, without the rehearsed theatricality implied in the term "performance," was a means of empowering a concept with an energy that would transcend confinement in the art world, reaching broader social realms. In his own critique of *Coyote*, Beuys claimed to have "made contact with the psychological trauma point of the United States's energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man. You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted."

Coyotlinauatl, Tezcatlipoca, Heuheu-coyotl, Coyolxauhqui, are some Native American Nahuatl names of coyote deities. From tribe to tribe these names change, but the veneration of the coyote is consistent among Native Americans. The coyote arrived here as the Asiatic wolf, about the time the first people began to inhabit the continent. In response to the rigors of the Ice Age, a remarkable evolution occurred: some wolves became coyotes. Thousands of years



JOSEPH BEUYS AT THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, JANUARY 1974

**Thinking itself  
became a form of  
sculpture and  
every human being  
became an artist.**



later, the farmers and ranchers who arrived from Europe brought with them a demonology of wolves that extended to the coyote. They were shot on sight. Since the 1940s over five million have been killed by the Animal Damage Control Program of the U.S. Wildlife Service. Neither god nor devil, this creature continues to defy eradication. From the woods of Cape Cod to the alleys of Los Angeles, the coyote remains in our midst. For his brief incarceration in a New York gallery, Joseph Beuys chose for his cellmate the greatest escape artist in the American animal kingdom.

In their majestic accommodation, man and animal succeeded in changing the nature of their environment from imprisonment to freedom. Beuys brought art to politics, extending the democratic principle beyond mankind to include animals. His fundamental assumption was that "love is the most creative and matter-transforming power," and it is to this power that he refers the isolated individual seeking emancipation. ■

**STEPHEN AIKEN** shows at the Helltown Salon in Provincetown and Swansborough Gallery in Wellfleet.



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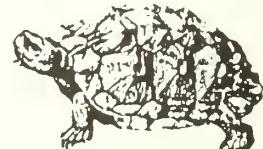
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# Virgin Land

for Joan Colebrook

by Arturo Vivante

"Would you like to go for a walk?" Joan—a friend and neighbor—said to me on a bright December morning, here in Wellfleet.

"Where to?"

"Oh, just a short walk, a block or two maybe. Up Main, down Bank Street to Commercial and back by Holbrook Avenue, how does that sound?"

"I like to walk new places, untrodden ground, virgin land," I said.

"Oh, come now, that doesn't exist anymore."

"You'd be surprised."

"Virgin land? Where are you going to find it? You'd have to go to the Amazon forest, Greenland, Baffin Land, Antarctica"

"No, no, there's plenty right around here."

"Where?" she said.

I drove her to Duck Harbor, which is only five minutes away from where I live, and we walked south along that narrow stretch of sand that the tide washes twice a day, renewing it, returning it to its pristine state, making it virgin land. "It's the most readily accessible virgin land left to us today," I said. "Not just untrodden, virgin—the sea creates it and recreates it with each wave."

"You have a point," she said.

From the beach we climbed a zigzag path to a high ridge and followed it along the edge of steep dunes that faced the bay. Far below, the sun was whetting knives in the water. Soon we came to a wimpled sandy hollow off the path. There were no footprints. Two or three compass weeds had drawn perfect circles in the sand.

"More virgin, wind-blown sand," Joan said with a sly smile.

"You are catching on."

From there we walked inland over a wide stretch of fairly level ground covered by bearberry, among bushes of bayberry, beach plum and mountain laurel. A little farther the bayberry gave way to deer moss which made a crinkly, crackly sound underfoot.

"Not exactly virgin, but untrodden," I said. "Trodden deer moss doesn't crackle."

"Virgin or untrodden—they amount to the same thing."

"That crunch is very satisfying."

"For you, not for it," she said.

"I expect you are right," I agreed. "Why look at things from our perspective?"

"No reason."

The deer moss got sparser and we reached a field whose long blades of sere grass were blown by the wind into low-lying, curving strands, all in one direction.

She knelt on the grass and said, "Untrailed, unwalked other than by such creatures as will find a way between its stems."

"You outdo me at every turn," I said.

She looked at me joyfully, her hair waving in the wind.

"Your hair is blowing like the grass. Leave it to the wind to find the best arrangements," I said.

We walked back to the car and drove six miles to the backside of the Cape where we watched the ocean without words, then took a path to Spectacle Pond, infinitesimal beside it.

"This rippled pond, unplied except by ducks, is virgin too," she said.

"As virgin as your clear, unruffled face."

"A grandmother though I am."

"Literal virginity doesn't interest me in the least," I said.

SOME days later, on a bleak, still, cold evening, she dropped by to see me. "Am I invited to dinner?" she said pertly.

"By all means. I'll cook some pasta."

We had supper and then she said, as she had before, "Let's go for a walk around the block."

"You know how tired I am of walking around the block—I know it too well."

But she took me by the hand, drew me to the kitchen door and opened it.

"Oh, it's snowing," I said.

"I knew it was going to. I heard the weather report. It said it was arriving shortly, and I came right over. Walk me home."

We left.

"The untrampled, snowy sidewalk is virgin country to me," she said on our way.

**ARTURO VIVANTE** is the author of two novels. His collected stories, *Tales of Arturo Vivante*, was published recently by the Sheep Meadow Press. He is a year-round resident of Wellfleet.

# Edmund Wilson and

by Jeffrey Meyers

## WE LLF L EET

Edmund Wilson had been spending most summers and an occasional winter on Cape Cod—the salty peninsula that juts into the Atlantic and then curves backward like a scorpion's tail—since he first visited Edna Millay in Truro in 1920. A repressed young man with a Princeton education from an upper middle-class New Jersey background, Wilson led a hard-working, hard-drinking literary life in bohemian Greenwich Village, writing poetry and fiction, making a slender living working on *Vanity Fair* and then on the *New Republic*. In the '20s he had rented Eugene O'Neill's house, an old Coast Guard station on the dunes in Provincetown, later destroyed by a gale. Here he had recovered from the failure of his first marriage in the late 1920s, grieved after the accidental death of his second wife in 1932, and escaped from the rackete life of Prohibition-era New York.

Always happiest in the country, though doomed to live and work in New York for most of the year, Wilson loved the foxes and deer, rabbits and pheasants, the bluish ponds, the pine forests filled with mushrooms, the grey dunes and salt marshes, the white bluffs above the empty beaches. He was drawn to the cool clear light, the changing colors of the swirling sea and cloud-streaked sky, the wildness and isolation, and the moody assaults of the ocean. "It is incomparably beautiful on the Cape," he told an English friend, "one of the most marvelous places in the world: a mixture of woodland and dunes: with any sort of swimming—ocean, bay and little fresh-water lakes, and a climate that is never too hot and only in midwinter too cold."

On the narrow bay side of the Lower Cape, Wellfleet had a number of colorful characters in its history. In 1870 Lorenzo Baker brought the first bananas to America and founded a banana empire that later became the United Fruit Company. Luther Vrowell invented the first machine to manufacture brown paper bags. Sarah Atwood was one of the first women lighthouse keepers. Contemporary Wellfleet also had congenial intellectuals and bohemian freedom, and the isolated residents formed a closely connected community. Wilson captured the mood when he recalled "all the parties, the days at the beach, the picnics, the flirtations, the drinking spells, the interims of work between trips, the moldy days of winter by the stoves, the days of keeping going on a thin drip or trickle of income."

Wellfleet, which tried to perpetuate the unconventional life of Provincetown in the 1920s, had a good deal of heavy drinking and emotional chaos. Everybody tried to be artistic, but few were real artists. Wilson, who frequently urged his friends to get on with their work, also complained about the unreal and somewhat pretentious atmosphere: "In Wellfleet, we see so much of artists whose pictures are never seen, composers whose music is never heard, writers who do not write or who are not really writers." Referring to his friends the Chavchavadzes, Russian aristocrats now taking in paying guests, to his fourth wife Elena, and to other close friends, he once told his daughter Rosalind, "You must remember, they're all exiles here."

In March 1941 Wilson, then married to his third wife, Mary McCarthy, borrowed \$1,500 from his mother, took out a mortgage for the rest and bought a \$4000 house in Wellfleet from the eccentric sister-in-law of Admiral Chester Nimitz. It was the only house—apart from the ancestral home in remote Talcottville, upstate New York, which he inherited on his mother's death in 1951—that he ever owned. The rambling, green-shuttered, white clapboard farmhouse, built in the 1820s, stood on Money Hill—outside the center of town—only a few yards from Route 6. In those days the road was still fairly quiet and had not yet become the busy main highway of today.

The old three-story house had a gravel driveway to the right, a front porch with four white pillars, and a railing on the second floor above it. The living room was in the front, an L-shaped kitchen and dining room were behind it, an "extremely pleasant middle room" behind that, then Wilson's study, with a bathroom and woodshed. Two bedrooms, filled with books, were upstairs. An old windmill used as a toolhouse and an old barn stood behind the house. A few shrubs and the big jungly garden on the left afforded some protection from the main road.

Wilson borrowed another thousand dollars from his publishers to heat and renovate the house, and moved in, with Mary, their baby son Reuel and the teenage Rosalind, in July 1941. Now in his mid-40s, Wilson wanted to give his new young family stability and to have a peaceful place to write and make his living. Though both he and Mary McCarthy worked productively there, the house became, as their relationship disintegrated, the scene of furious quarrels. But he lived there with his fourth wife until the end of his life, and it is now the home of their daughter, Helen.

Until he settled at Wellfleet, Wilson had very few possessions apart from his books and papers, some old clothes and scraps of furniture. For years he had lived in borrowed houses and rented apartments in New York. First Mary and then Elena gradually fixed up the place and deco-



rated the "yellow living room with a few engravings and Victorian mahogany pieces, including a sofa covered with lemony, striped silk." But the bohemian still mingled with the bourgeois elements in his character. A later visitor recalled that Elena painted the living room sofa, when they could not afford to buy a new one, with predictably awful results. He did not have a telephone in Wellfleet for many years because he refused to pay the \$10 deposit that the phone company demanded.

Wilson played the eccentric country squire in Wellfleet as he would later do in Talcottville. He carved like a paterfamilias when the Sunday roast was served and gave peremptory orders to the local workmen. When a contractor dug a big pit and asked the impractical Wilson what to do with the dirt, he instructed him to "bury it." In 1947 he bluntly told the critic Dwight Macdonald: "I hear you're driving my car this summer." "But Edmund, I bought the car from Mary for a dollar," Dwight replied, recalling how she'd won the 1938 Chevrolet in a local raffle. "But," insisted Wilson, "I gave her the money for the ticket"—which had cost him a quarter. In the early 1950s Wilson enhanced his prestige by inheriting one of his mother's custom-built Cadillacs and hiring a woman to drive him around in it.

The Wellfleet house had plenty of animals. Wilson's pets included Bambi, the deer-and-caramel-colored cocker spaniel, and Reckii, short for Rex or Reckless, the mongrel-German shepherd. There were also invaders. Writing from personal experience in his essay on *Finnegans Wake*, Wilson quoted Joyce on "copious holes emitting mice." The editor Jason Epstein, who sometimes exchanged houses with Wilson, remembered the many rats, which came from the old barn at the back and were attracted to the garbage cans. They would begin to scratch the walls at sunset and then emerge on their predatory quest. But Wilson, who was fond of rats and had six books on the subject in his library, did not want them killed.

In June 1946 Wilson told Elena that he had found the maid in a state of hysteria because rats were running around the kitchen. He tried to reassure her by promising to poison them, but was reluctant to carry out his threat. The rats, which ate the straw place mats and gnawed the covers off his books, he celebrated in verse:

*Then it's sad to see those with the covers so scarred  
By the plumbing that burst, which will always be marr'd,  
And the ones with glued backs eaten off with their titles'  
By rats when keen hunger was eating their vitals.*

He destroyed one large brown rat with poison, but could not bear to drown the young ones. In his comic Christmas poem, "The Rats of Rutland Grange," he conceded that the enemy had outwitted him: "These rats had come to know too well/ All death-baits that the drugists sell."

Rats aside, Wilson took his civic duties seriously. In 1951, when the Army tried to extend its gunnery range near Wellfleet, Wilson—with his neighbors Waldo Frank, Paul Chavchavadze and a dozen others—protested, in a letter to the *New York Times*, that the missiles "would gravely damage the fishing industry and vacation trade, which provide the livelihood of most Cape Codders."

Wilson's appearance was as eccentric as his habits. Only five feet, six inches tall, in 1945 he weighed 200 pounds. Friends commented on his dishabille at home and on his formal dress when he sallied forth in that unbuttoned community. When comfortably working in his study, Wilson, like the idle character in the Russian novel, wore his Oblomov garb of light gray pajamas and a salmon bathrobe until it was time to change for dinner. Mary McCarthy called Wilson "Monstro" and the "Minotaur," and Dwight Macdonald's son Michael remembered him "buried in his labyrinth, at the end of a hallway lined by tall, black-bound Diaries—and bellowing from deep within his literary lair at lunchtime." David Chavchavadze, the son of his friend Paul, "used to see him at the beach in Wellfleet wearing a hat and a white suit with a necktie. He never seemed to wear sportshirts." He usually wore, as the 1940s photograph with Mary McCarthy shows, "a white suit and plain wool tie, usually maroon. It stuck out on the Cape where no men . . . wore ties." Alfred Kazin, a literary summer resident, also saw Wilson as a throwback to an earlier era, as a man who seemed completely out of place among the bohemians on the Cape: "With his round bald head and that hoarse, heavily breathing voice box coming out of the red face of an overfed fox-hunting squire, Wilson looked apoplectic, stiff, out of breath." Yet Kazin was also impressed and even overwhelmed "by a certain seediness, the great bald dome, the lack of small talk, the grumpy concentration on every topic he came to."

Though almost entirely sedentary, Wilson enjoyed swimming in the sea and in Gull Pond. John Dos Passos described Wilson breasting the Jersey surf in the early '20s, still talking about Henry James in his long unbroken paragraphs and refusing to allow the waves to interfere with his train of thought. Michael Macdonald recalled his equally idiosyncratic way of swimming two decades later on Cape Cod: "He called it the 'one-arm treadle.' Only his right arm was used for propulsion in a kind of semi-crawl, with Edmund occasionally surfacing to gasp some air—before resuming his head-down, straight-ahead progress, sawing the air with one arm, as his unseen left arm stabilized his body."

Wilson's life in Wellfleet—as he told a friend—was orderly, conducive to work and almost idyllic:

"We are leading a very monotonous but very comfortable life. Breakfast; I read a little while, then write; lunch; when I read the morning mail; write till about three; then we collect the afternoon mail and the New York paper, buy something to drink and take a walk in the woods and along the shore; on returning, I shave to the sound of the phonograph; drinks and supper...and I play solitaire (I have a book called *150 Ways to Play Solitaire*); bed about half past 10, and I read an Elizabethan play or something more recent."

Once the stormy days with Mary McCarthy were over and he had made a successful and final marriage, Wilson entered one of the most productive phases of his life, consolidating his literary reputation as the formidable *New Yorker* critic and reporter. The Wellfleet house and its lovely setting gave Wilson the peace and privacy he needed to write. ■

**JEFFREY MEYERS**, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, has recently published a life of Scott Fitzgerald and is now completing a biography of Edmund Wilson for Houghton Mifflin.

above: JACK COUGHLIN, "Edmund Wilson" pencil, watercolor, 5 1/2 x 5 5/8"

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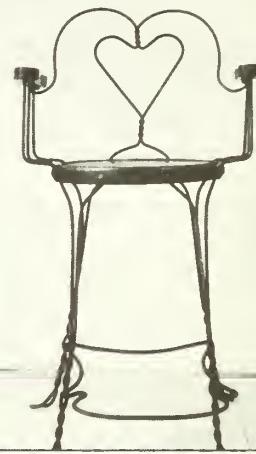
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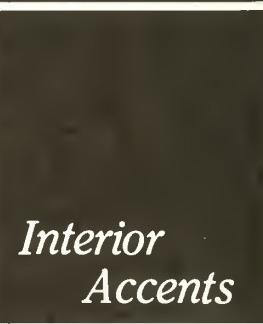
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## WELLFLEET

# The Seacoast of Bohemia

by Joan Marks

**IN HER** novel, *A Charmed Life*, Mary McCarthy makes it plain that the despised "New Leeds" is recognizably Wellfleet, where she lived during her marriage to Edmund Wilson. It is a place McCarthy populates with those "who had no object in life except to see each other over a drink," and she excoriates it mercilessly with the unflagging whip of her irony:

*And it was typical of New Leeds that you could not take a drink without wondering whether you might become an alcoholic. Everything here cast a menacing shadow before it, a shade of future perdition. There was something sinister . . . in the fact that you could not get anything repaired. There was nobody to fix the clock; the man who sharpened lawn mowers had died during the summer and nobody succeeded him; the local laundry service could not clean a suit without tearing and discoloring it; the garage-man's only accomplishment was the ability to scratch his head. Everything in the village was relentlessly running down, buckling, warping, mildewing—including the human beings . . . the gay, smart wives, mottled and bedizened, fantastically got up with shawls and peasant bangles—when two of them got together . . . they made the First National check-out look like a fortune-tellers' convention. New Leeds was, literally, the seacoast of Bohemia.*

Forty years after it first appeared, this then-scandalous tale of adultery, between two people who once were married to one another, has lost much of its shock value. But to Beatrice Grabbe, a peppery, gray-haired Wellfleet resident of long standing who knew but was not fond of McCarthy at Vassar College, it is an old sore that still festers. A close observer of the local scene, she points out, "One of the couples in the book Mary was not gracious about had been very kind to her. I thought it too bad that she returned their kindness by laughing at their idiosyncrasies. Mary was looking for trouble—remember, she divorced Edmund Wilson. She was biased because she was bitter."

McCarthy's chronicle of shallow people who "come here to gather dust, on a pair of small incomes and the revenue from an August

rental," and who "eventually go to pieces, like everybody else," hits a nerve but trivializes a community by ignoring its complexity.

Approximately the same number of people inhabit Wellfleet today as lived here during the mid-19th century, when it was a hamlet of 2400 mackerel fishermen and their families, a group of sober and serious folk, partial to discussing topics such as temperance, agriculture, and education at the town's Lyceum Institute. So tight a hold did religion have on the fishermen that they were nicknamed "Biblebacks" for their reluctance to cast their lines on Sundays. Sunday prohibitions, however, represented only a vestige of religion's power, as the unfortunate Robert Jordan discovered when the Methodist congregation put him on trial and expelled him because his wife gave birth five months after their marriage.

How did such sober-minded, God-fearing citizens metamorphose into drunken, sybaritic wastrels in less than a century? Or was the change really that dramatic? Surely not. Wellfleet of the '40s and '50s was in fact an amalgam of both bohemian and puritan strains, just as it is today. A few notable personalities, along with a host of others not as well known, gave this small community an artistic and intellectual identity that is complex and dynamic.

During the first half of this century, a multi-faceted new population transformed Wellfleet from a solid bedrock of conservatism into a shifting, many-layered terrain which nurtures quirkiness, applauds alternative lifestyles, and beckons to those who have the ingenuity to live by their wits. Some people who fell into these categories were to surface in the throng of artists, writers, architects, professors, psychiatrists, scientists, and intellectuals of all stripes who poured seasonally into Wellfleet in numbers which kept increasing exponentially for several decades.

Wellfleet's 20 square miles are bounded by the Atlantic Ocean and Cape Cod Bay. The area is bisected by a main highway, Route 6, which runs for eight unremarkable miles between the

## "Some Wellfleet Artists" Polaroid Transfer Portraits

by Walter Baron

These portraits were done in a two-step process using two different Polaroid films. The first step was to do the original portraits using Polaroid 35mm Black & White Instant Slide film. These I developed using a Polaroid 35mm Instant Slide processor, lent to me by Peter Maltbie. The second step was to make Polaroid Transfer images using a Vivitar Instant Slide Printer and Polaroid type 669 film. Paper used for the transfers is Arches hot press watercolor, mostly 140 lb., but a few sheets are 300 lb.

This project is supported, in part, by the Mass. Cultural Council, as administered by the Wellfleet Cultural Council.

—WALTER BARON



LINDA MCCAUSSLAND



WALTER DORRELL



RIVER KARMEN



Audubon Sanctuary in South Wellfleet and the Truro border. The town center is a decaying vision of Victorian gentility. Once-imposing sea captains' homes now shelter upscale art galleries and craft shops, while other turn-of-the-century homes, spruced up with paint and new siding, stand out like gingerbread oddities among traditional Cape houses. Only when you leave the main highway and walk or drive the back roads, dirt paths, and hiking trails do you become surprised—even astonished—by the hidden Wellfleet, glistening with glacial ponds sheltered by stands of pine and scrub oak, so silent that even the wind whistling through the trees seems like an intrusion. The ponds are Wellfleet's glory, but no less breathtaking are its superb bay salt marshes and rolling ocean dunes.

For Marianne Strengell and Olav Hammarstrom, who were born and raised in small villages in Finland, Wellfleet's charm was irresistible. Now a frail couple in their 80s but still tall and erect, they came to Wellfleet in the '40s and were married here. She is a well-known and versatile fabric designer; he, an architect who designed the Chapel in the Pines of the Church of St. James the Fisherman. "It's changed remarkably little over the years, it's really still like a quaint New England village," Hammarstrom remarks, adding that these qualities can be particularly attractive to people like themselves who come from European countries. "The contemporary buildings are all in the woods and the interesting people are well hidden."

The need for quiet and isolation preoccupy many in the area. B.J. Lifton, an author specializing in the subject of adoption, describes herself as a virtual recluse, prizing her privacy and her "special relationship to the sea," enjoyed from the ocean-front home she shares with her husband, Robert Jay Lifton, a psychiatrist and renowned author of books on the Holocaust, human survival, and the protean fluidity of hu-

man identity. He finds an extraordinary quality in the local atmosphere that transforms everyday life: "Everything I experience is more intense than elsewhere: the work, the ideas, the encounters with people. Everything is more purified and more of a risk. One doesn't have the protective barriers, the interruptions and intrusions."

Edmund Wilson, whose worship of Wellfleet's physical beauty was especially lyrical, wrote in his journal: "The pond was dark through the trees as I approached, and then I saw a doe and a well-grown fawn, light and tawny against the green, that made away into the woods, and they were followed, after a moment, by another fawn. As I came down, a black-and-white loon flew away from the smaller pond. The cranberries, yellow, were reddening like little apples and crunched under my feet as I walked." And even Mary McCarthy can quit caviling long enough to relish the "steel-blue fresh-water ponds and pine forests and mushrooms and white bluffs dropping to a strangely pebbled beach."

Wilson described Wellfleet, where he bought a house in 1941 for \$4000 and lived on and off until his death, as a "bit of enchanted ground at Cape Cod" and the corner of America he loved best, except in summer when he called it "the fucking Riviera." Indeed, with one main street, few restaurants, and a non-existent night life, what residents and visitors did for entertainment was to give parties and go to the beach. By the mid-'60s, on any August afternoon, the notables had assembled, including, according to Alfred Kazin in an essay about Wilson: "television producers, government and U.N. 'advisers'—social scientists, psychohistorians, professors by the dozen...Arthur and Marian Schlesinger, Gilbert Seldes, Allen Tate and Isabella Gardner, Edwin and Veniette O'Connor, Richard and Beatrice Hofstadter, Robert and Betty Jean Lifton, Irving and Arien Howe, Harry and Elena Levin, Daniel and Janet Aaron. At times there could also be seen Stuart and Suzanne Hughes, Jason and Barbara Epstein, Philip and Maggie Roth, Marcel and Constance Breuer. Once there was a view of Svetlana, daughter of Stalin, accompanied by the Georgian writer Chavchavadze, whose wife was a Romanoff."

"Wilson's arrival on the Wellfleet beach regularly caused a stir," Kazin writes. "A definite mental avidity and nervous unrest fixed itself around his bulky antique figure. He was so defi-

nately not of this time. The sight of him in his Panama hat and well-filled Bermuda shorts, the cane propped up in the sand like a sword in declaration of war, instantly brought out in me a mixed anxiety and hilarity that I used to feel watching Laurel and Hardy about to cross a precipice. There was so much mischief, disdain and intellectual solemnity wrapped up behind that get-up, that high, painfully distinct voice, that lonely proud face."

During his lonely Wellfleet winters, years before he wrote his book on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Wilson would reflect on the plea spoken by Orthodox Jews in synagogue when they finish each scriptural book: "Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another." In Hebrew letters, this is engraved on his tombstone in Wellfleet cemetery. A talented linguist who could read five languages fluently, Wilson had a predilection for Hebrew so pronounced that his daughter, Helen, says, "When I was going to the Wellfleet Consolidated School, there were no Jewish kids and no black kids. I thought I was Jewish until I was 10, because my father kept going over to Israel and studying Hebrew." Norma Simon, an author of children's books whose daughter Wendy worked at the South Wellfleet General Store when Wilson was a regular there, relates that Wendy was so accustomed to seeing him that she scarcely gave him a thought until the day he stopped coming anymore. After she sent a note of condolence to his widow, Wendy was amazed to discover the extent of his fame and accomplishments in an obituary. The next time Elena Wilson came in, she told Wendy that no matter how tired her husband was he always wanted to come into that store to see "that girl's smile." And Wendy said, "I thought we'd just miss Mr. Wilson in Wellfleet, but now I see the whole world is going to miss him."

One person who was pivotal in shaping the community's distinctive character is Jack Phillips, referred to as the "Boston Brahmin," a painter and a courtly charmer of 85 whose suave good looks and British accent seem tailor-made for his sometime role in Tetley Tea commercials. During the 30s, Phillips inherited some wooded acreage perforated by ponds and hidden in an area of Wellfleet between Route 6 and the ocean known as the "backwoods." When he moved there year-round from Boston in 1936, he helped transform the area into a glade settled by architects, artists, writers and political scientists who clustered near the ponds



MEG SHIELDS



GIP HOPPE



PAUL SUGGS



HELEN MIRANDA WILSON

they found so irresistible. His father tried to persuade him to dump the land, claiming he could never afford the taxes on property then valued at \$12 an acre. Instead of selling the scattered lots, Phillips bought more wilderness filled with ducks and geese. He acquired a small hunting lodge and made it his home, adding rooms to accommodate everyone who wanted a pond view until it greatly increased in size "like a railroad train." This isolated spot was once the center of town, but the only other structures in the area in 1936 were one house and one of the original Wellfleet schoolhouses, which is now commemorated by a marker.

Phillips soon tackled another project, quickly dubbed the Phillips Paper Palace, a two-story house overlooking the ocean and built from second-hand lumber and homosote, a paper sheathing. During one summer in the midst of World War II, he rented it to the Chilean surrealist known simply as Matta, who paid \$450 for the season and promptly invited carloads of international guests such as Peggy Guggenheim and Max Ernst to join him. To Phillips, hardly a Puritanical person himself—he has been married five times—they were a revelation. He recalls: "I had to go over there frequently to check on things. I acted as a sort of janitor for the property. They thought I was a very conservative type and teased me about being a stuffed shirt. They seemed to have a cute, cozy relationship with one another which was different than with the rest of us. They told me about the games they played, all kinds of surrealistic games, including Truth or Consequences, where the penalty was to masturbate in front of one another."

That era was a skittish time when many were haunted by the notion that German spies would land there. Phillips' daughter, singer Blair Resika, still recalls being scared as a child by stories of the enemy marching over the dunes. In this climate, the house Matta occupied became an object of close scrutiny because so many foreigners lived there. Max Ernst was hauled off for questioning by the FBI and became so incensed he never returned. Matta's brush with the law was more comical, as Peter Watts, who helped renovate Phillips' cottages, recalls: "The house he was renting had many flat roofs at different levels. A group of local Nazi hunters suspected spies were operating from them, and once when Matta was alone came to check because they suspected someone was sending semaphore signals to submarines. They asked Matta, 'How many ladders do you have?' Matta thought for awhile and responded, 'I have five:

M-A-T-T-A.' With his imperfect English, he thought they said letters, not ladders. After that, they left him alone."

Phillips kept on building. The idea was to erect houses cheaply and then rent or sell them. After the war ended, inexpensive army barracks were available. Phillips purchased some and had them shipped north from Georgia on railroad flatcars. "It turned out to be a bad idea," he concedes. The structures were loaded onto the cars in the rain and they reached the Wellfleet railroad station in the midst of a snow storm. "The wood pieces had frozen together, and it was quite a challenge to pry them apart and get them to different locations." It took backhoes, bulldozers and pick axes to accomplish the task. "I finally got five cottages built out of the barracks, and added chimneys and fireplaces to make them look more homey. When the architect, Marcel Breuer, took a look at them later on, he told me he could have done it cheaper."

Phillips kept thinking up schemes to use his land to better advantage. After an attempt to grow celery in a swamp proved fruitless, he experimented with raising turkeys, installing 100 birds in his ocean-front studio. "What a view they must have had!" marvels another daughter, writer Hayden Herrera. Encouraged by early success, Phillips increased his flock to 3,000 chicks and built brooder houses to lodge them. He did pretty well until the turkeys got every known disease and he had to sell short. For a long time, the family ate nothing but turkey. The former "turkey houses" now serve as summer retreats for Phillips' daughters.

Even when he did not make the sale himself, Phillips was still sometimes the catalyst responsible for it. Marcel Breuer happened to get stuck in the sand near his house and asked if he could make a phone call; Phillips found the land nearby where Breuer built his home. In an interview Howard Wise videotaped in 1974, Breuer is relaxed and soft-spoken as he philosophizes about art and architecture: "Art is really to get along with limitations, and if the artist doesn't have any limits, he sets them himself. The achievement is to master these limitations." Referring to the design of the Whitney Museum, one of his major projects, he remarks, "I think

the Whitney itself has a certain personality without hurting the exhibitions—that is the architect's job."

Breuer's legacy to the area consists of four houses: his own and three others virtually identical to it. They are L-shaped structures whose elegance is derived from starkly simple lines. One that overlooks Long Pond is owned by Gyorgy Kepes, a painter, photographer, teacher, writer, and thinker, recently retired from MIT, who draws no clear boundaries between art and science. Sitting on his cantilevered porch which seems to be floating on the water, he says, "Here I can be myself." Kepes and Breuer were acquaintances in Europe who became friends on the Cape. "Breuer was more than happy to design my house," Kepes says. "Unlike artists who paint whether there is opportunity or not, architects have to wait for a chance to show their talent. He was a kind man who always listened to his clients; our architect-client relationship was without conflicts."

Barbara Wise had the same kind of experience when she and her husband Howard commissioned their house in the '60s. "We had rented a house Breuer built on the bay off Chequesset Neck Road and I found it just wonderful to live in, so that when we bought our property on Indian Neck Heights I said I wanted a Breuer house. We called him, and he said why don't you let me do a version of my house, be-

cause to start a new design would cost too much money. He looked at our land and said it was perfect for a mirror image of his house. We got Ernie Rose, the same builder who did all the Breuer houses. And it was so easy. If Ernie called with a question, I'd say, 'Go over to Breuer's house and see how he did it.' Ernie gave us an estimate of what it would cost, and it came in for less. We loved working with Breuer—he was the sweetest, most gentle man, wry and witty."

Another neighbor of Breuer's who preceded him here, Anna Hamburger, is preoccupied with helping preserve the area's essential character, so much so that she requested its exact location be kept secret, fearful of intrusions by those who might not respect the ponds' fragility. She is a charming woman, but her tone of voice changes to reflect her anxiety when she discusses the National Seashore, which could pose threats to the ponds: ironically, the Seashore protects the area from further building but at the same time makes it accessible to outsiders. There is even a plan to put a bicycle path there, all of which worries her because she feels these encroachments could mean the end of the kind of life she has enjoyed for more than half a century. Her husband Philip Hamburger, a writer for the *New Yorker*, says the place has such a magical quality for her that when she is in New York she can close her eyes and drown out the sounds of Lexington Avenue just by imagining the walk



ELLEN LeBOW

between their place and the nearest pond—"She knows every step of the way."

She first came to Provincetown with her parents in 1928, and six years later moved into the 19th-century house where she still lives. "I'm happy to say there were no artists or writers, only three Colonial houses and a small wild bird hunting cabin owned by Jack Phillips." That comment seems strange coming from one who has married two writers. Her first husband, Norman Matson, had seen the house they bought several years before. At that time, he was the husband of Susan Glaspell, a writer who was part of the circle which surrounded Eugene O'Neill. "They had a winter house in Provincetown and a summer house in Truro," Anna Hamburger remembers. "One day, Norman was taking a walk, saw this house, and fell in love

with it immediately. Later, he got into a roadster with his wife but couldn't locate it because then there was no road." After Anna and Matson were married and had two small children, they contacted Elizabeth Freeman, a real estate agent who told them about a wonderful house in the woods. "She took Norman down to the ocean and then back towards Route 6, where he saw the house he had been looking for on any number of rainy days for eight years."

The Matsons lived there year-round until their children were older. "When we spent the winters here," she says, "there were literally



HARVESTING CLAMS  
Photo: Lynne Burns



PETER WATTS



DAN RICE



JAMES LECHAY

only half a dozen people between here and Provincetown who read the *New York Times*. It was a tremendous privilege to live in that kind of semi-isolation: no telephone or electricity, just running water and a gasoline engine for power." She did her best to guard her privacy: "I was up in the woods once when I first saw Xavier Gonzalez in a jeep coming from the ocean. He said he was lost—he was looking for Wellfleet. I asked him why, and he said he thought he was going to open an art school. So I told him I wasn't going to tell him how to get there. I didn't want to live in an art colony. Would you? Where artists go, the crowd will always follow."

Over time the few people grew into a group numbering perhaps 50, banding together like members of a fraternity with a common password. Phillips called them the "friendly aliens." Attracted to one another by a high level of sophistication and culture, they inevitably set themselves apart, although, as Philip Hamburger said, "among our friends, there is no cultural elitism. The animal life around here can be described as various forms of creativity. They don't make a point of being intelligent—they just are."

Just as hidden away as the Hamburger's, but on the other side of Route 6 near the bay, is an area known as Bound Brook Island. Jack Hall, an artist who once augmented his income by serving as a property agent and rent collector for Jack Phillips, bought his first house there in 1938 for \$3000 and has since purchased three others within a quarter-mile of each other. Bound Brook used to be a real island which people would cross on a foot bridge, but when a dike was put across Wellfleet Harbor in 1909, the marshes and interior bays dried up and the island disappeared. Hall, who designed, built, and remodelled more than 20 houses in the immediate area where he lives, refuses to disclose who his clients are. "Their names are on the mailboxes," he says. For Hall, a transplanted New Yorker, Wellfleet's allure was its small-town atmosphere. When he first came here there was no police department. "In the summer, there was one policeman who directed traffic in the main town parking lot. He drank all winter, but when Memorial Day came he sobered up, put on a uniform, and went to work. If there was any commotion or ruckus in town, though, one of the selectmen who had been appointed chief of police would deal with it—that wasn't the paid policeman's job."

Peter Watts, an artist who lives in an adjoining area, remembers how simple things used to be, even in 1970 when he bought his 19th cen-

tury house. He recalls attending a town meeting when Charlie Frazier, the only lawyer in town, served as moderator. "That night Davey Curran, the town drunk, rode his horse right into the meeting hall. Charlie said, 'You're a registered voter and you can stay, but that horse will have to leave!'" In another experiment in informal self-government, Watts relates that there was once a community vegetable garden on Bound Brook Island where anyone could take vegetables provided they contributed some money for seeds. During the McCarthy era, when the community was split between the John Birchers and the liberals, a further schism took place between the liberals. The anarchist Trotskyites split off from the Stalinists and one group wouldn't talk to the other. Afterwards, a sign went up: "Absolutely no Trotskyites can take vegetables from this garden!"

The sculptor Penelope Jencks, a tall, pleasant woman who with her husband Sidney Hurwitz, an artist and professor, is another near neighbor who has still earlier memories of the area. Her parents, Ruth and Gardiner Jencks, built in 1939 the house she still occupies. She remembers that Provincetown, in the '40s and '50s, was an hour away by car. "We'd go there every couple of weeks, a tremendous trip that we planned well in advance. We had no electricity until 1949. My father installed a generator that would work from time to time—when it was on, we'd fill the bathtub with water. I had a friend who lived in Sladerville, off Castle Road in Truro, and I'd visit her by bus, stay a week, and come home by bus. It was a nice place for kids to grow up because you didn't have to worry about things parents worry about now, like talking to strangers. There were no strangers. My friend and I used to wander around the island. If we got lost, we'd climb the nearest hill and we could always spot my house."

Finding a job as a nanny brought Florence Rich here in 1934. During the Depression, a friend of hers who was a single parent landed a job in Boston, and needed someone to take care of her little boy. Since Wellfleet was far cheaper than Boston, they chose to move into a former gunning camp near the center of town, where a contingent of newcomers had settled. Later, realizing she had to go to work when her husband went off during World War II, she pondered her choices: "I could be a real estate agent, except I didn't have a car. I could open shellfish

and sell them at a stand, but if people were waiting I'd be too nervous. Or I could open an art gallery which I could combine with teaching rug hooking." She selected the last option, opening Wellfleet's first art gallery in 1947 in her home on Commercial Street. She reasoned that people on vacation with time on their hands might want to visit a gallery. Initially, she carried work by some Boston artists and by "a lot of old ladies who cleared out their portfolios for whatever I could get for them. I'd sell unmatted watercolors for two dollars. My first real sale was \$75 for a framed oil by an artist named Mo Com, bought by Mrs. Hutchins Hapgood who lived across the street." When her husband sold their house the next year, she rented a former blacksmith shop where the Cove Gallery is now. The place was in bad shape. The floor was gone. She spread white sand in its place. There was a hole in the roof. If it rained during the night, she'd get dressed quickly and rescue the watercolors. For 10 years, until she gave the galley up, she tried to offer the public something unusual, not just run of the mill landscapes by local people. Among the artists she showed were Lucy L'Engle, Peter Busa, and Sabina Teichmann. Forty years later, she looks back and laments, "I was too soon—everything I did was too soon."

Two artists she represented became good friends of hers, Ethel Edwards and Xavier Gonzalez, a couple whose exotic good looks and considerable charm contributed to the mystique which surrounded them. Both Gonzalez, who died recently, and Edwards were attentive and empathic listeners who seemed totally absorbed by others. At the same time, they were consummate storytellers themselves. A neighbor, Harriet Rubin, who, with her partner Del Filardi, runs the Blue Heron Gallery across the street, observed the couple often: "They were the king and queen of Wellfleet. They used to go out every night. They would emerge from his studio and stand there a minute or two, he in a rakish beret, she in one of her marvelous black outfits wearing a gold piece of sculpture he'd made for her—an extraordinary necklace—around her throat. I always wanted to take their picture, but by the time I got my camera, they had gone."

Discovering Wellfleet in the early '40s, the couple looked for a house to purchase. On a rainy night they saw a somber, imposing Victorian, erected 100 years ago as a bank by Elizabeth Freeman's grandfather, a sea captain who

also built the Masonic Temple. Gonzalez started an art school on the third floor and Edwards took care of the registration. They ran the school for six years and made enough money to pay their bills. When it was over, they had a little ceremony and took down the sign that said "Xavier Gonzalez School of Painting." Gonzalez's fondness for the community inspired him to design a 300-pound aluminum Christmas angel which he presented to the town in 1955. The entire project was a group effort with Nickerson Hardware donating the aluminum and others contributing to the lighting and installation. The angel was displayed on the front of Town Hall every Christmas for five years until it was destroyed in a fire when slippery roads prevented a fire truck just one block away from reaching the conflagration. "The angel seemed to have mysterious healing properties," Edwards said. "People said when they saw it, they would stop arguing—it had a wonderful calming effect."

James Lechay, who first hitchhiked to Provincetown in 1921, when the only painters of stature working in Wellfleet were Edwin Dickinson and George Biddle, eventually found the bustling Provincetown community too congested, frantic, and artificial, preferring Wellfleet because it was a safer place to bring up children. He was in the vanguard of artists like Gilbert Franklin, Sideo Fromboluti, Nora Speyer, Judith Rothschild, Budd Hopkins, John Grillo, and Eleni and Jack Larned, who migrated to Wellfleet in the '50s after spending many summers in Provincetown.

Howard Wise, whose gallery in New York was the first to exhibit video art, began to videotape a series of interviews with various artists and intellectuals of the area, including one with Edwin Dickinson in 1973 when the artist was 81. With so many who figured prominently in Wellfleet's cultural life now in their 70s and 80s, it's heartening to observe that a new generation has established itself, including the writers Marge Piercy, Annie Dillard, Arturo Vivante, and Lawrence Shainberg. The actor and playwright Gip Hoppe and producer Jeff Zinn are the directors of the thriving Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater. And there is a younger generation of artists including Ellen Lebow, Stephen Aiken, Daniel Ranalli, and Michael Seccareccia.

Another younger artist is Meg Gormley

Shields, 40, who with her husband Glenn, the Wellfleet harbormaster, occupies the house next to the Hamburgers which has been in her family for four generations. Her shoulder-length brown hair is pulled straight back off her forehead to frame white skin and greenish eyes which hint at her English-Irish origins. An engagingly direct and self-assured person, she says she loves the "physical silence" of Wellfleet. After receiving a graduate degree in literature from University College in Dublin 14 years ago, she became aware that she was not cut out to be an academic. She came here, slumped into a waitressing job, and mulled things over. When her father died unexpectedly, the family home became hers. What began as a temporary plan evolved into a permanent one. For a portion of her income she teaches a review course to help prepare students for college entrance exams in English and she harvests oysters and clams. "Shell fishing is easy to do and the money is good," she says. "I just finished transplanting little baby clams from boxes to the flats. It took a couple of hours. It's usually a tidal thing—I work when the tide is out. I'm basically a laborer, but I love the outdoors. I don't resent it. Everyone has an obligation to work. I don't expect to get a lot of money for my paintings until I get to be a really good painter, which I am slowly becoming. Everything I do is in aid of painting. I produce the circumstances in which I can paint."

Shields typifies the mix of puritan and bohemian strands which forged the community's distinctive character. "I feel like I straddle both worlds. I combine in myself the fishing, the artistic, and the year-round nature of the town." She, like other artists here, finds it easy to mingle with the flinty New Englanders who are much more prominent in winter than in summer. Each population loves their common ground. "It's very hard not to be smug just because you're here," she says. "I have to constantly remind myself that it was a series of chances that brought me here. It's just so peerlessly beautiful—it's got to be one of the most beautiful spots on earth." ■

**JOAN MARKS** is a journalist and summer resident of Truro.

# PROVINCETOWN GALLERY GUILD

P. O. BOX 242 • PROVINCETOWN • MA 02657

## BERTA WALKER GALLERY WEST WINDOW

153 Commercial Street (just west of Martin House) • 487-6411  
 Daily 6pm–11pm or by appointment • Director: Ewa Nogiec-Smith  
 Weekly theme exhibitions of selected work by artists represented by Berta Walker  
 Gallery East (see listing) including Critchley, R. Del Deo, B. Dunigan, Harding,  
 Jaffee, Kearney, Lechay, MacAdam, McCanna, Ray, Strong, Whorf & Winter.

## BERTA WALKER GALLERY

208 Bradford St. • 487-6411 • Daily summer: 11am–4pm; 7pm–10pm  
 or by appointment • Director: Berta Walker  
 Representing important Provincetown-affiliated artists including Cohen, Cravenho,  
 M. Dunigan, N. Fried, M. Fried, Henry, Hutchinson, LaSelle, Musselman, Nogiec-  
 Smith, Pepitone, Peters, Trieff, plus works from the estates of Hawthorne, Moffett,  
 Lazzell & Weinrich (see listing Berta Walker West Window).

## CLIBBON GALLERY

120 Commercial St. • 487-3563 • Daily 10am–5pm; Fri. & Sat. 7pm–9pm  
 Directors: Robert Clibbon & Melyssa Bearse  
 A summer gallery specializing in color etchings of marine and animal life, romantic  
 themes and dune landscapes, Robert Clibbon and Melyssa Bearse, husband &  
 wife, sell their work directly to the public. Meet the artists!

## CORTLAND JESSUP GALLERY

432 Commercial St. (at Kiley Court) • 487-4479  
 Daily 11am–11pm • Director: Cortland Jessup  
 New painting, sculpture & photography—an oasis of fine art in a new location  
 in the East End gallery area. Representing established and emerging artists working  
 in a variety of media with a special emphasis on photography.

## DNA—Definitive New AA Gallery

286A Bradford St. (above Provincetown Tennis Club) • 487-7700  
 Daily 11am–10pm or by appointment • Director: Nick Lawrence  
 Featuring innovative work in a variety of media by artists from Provincetown,  
 New York, Los Angeles and Boston. Emphasis on environmental art by Peter Beard,  
 Mary Behrens, Joan Genity, Jared Handelsman, Nick Lawrence, Portia Munson,  
 Anna Poor, Dan Ranalli, Pedro dePereyra, Edie Vonnegut, Michelle Weinberg &  
 others. Special events include films, readings, music, and more.

## EAST END GALLERY

432 Commercial St. • 487-4745 • Daily 11am–4pm;  
 7pm–11pm or by appt. • Director: Bunny Pearlman  
 Representing nationally known artists from Provincetown, Boston & New York:  
 Arthur Cohen, Michael Costello, Nicholas Kahn, Mela Lyman, Burny Pearlman,  
 Phillip Schwartz, Richard Selesnick, Richard Smith, and Tabitha Vevers.

## ELEMENTS

338 Commercial St. • 487-4351, FAX: 487-2743 • Open Daily at 11am  
 Directors: Ben Kettlewell & Claudia Gal • Open year-round  
 A gallery whose primary focus is on contemporary handcrafted jewelry representing  
 over 80 designers in gold, sterling and mixed media. Also featured is a large  
 collection of art glass, raku, metal work and fine art by local and internationally-  
 known artists.

## ELLEN HARRIS GALLERY

355 Commercial St. • 487-1414 or 487-0065 • Daily 11am–11pm;  
 weekends thru the winter • Director: Ellen Harris Winans  
 The 25th season. Special exhibitions opening Friday nights of works by Jean Cain,  
 Albert Davis, Michael Davis, Melissa Greene, Giovanni & Babette Martino, Susan  
 Tilton Pecora, Feather Sedam & Carol Whorf Westcott. Fine arts and fine crafts  
 by America's foremost artists & artisans.

## EVA DE NAGY ART GALLERY

427 Commercial St. • 487-9669 • Daily 10am–2pm;  
 7pm–10pm; Off-season by appointment • Director: Eva De Nagy  
 Est. 1960. Paintings, pastels, drawings by Eva De Nagy; 17th century Phillipine  
 Santos; ivory & semi-precious stone carvings; bronzes from Nepal; African &  
 Asiatic art; jewelry by Eva De Nagy; paintings by American-Hungarian artist Erno  
 De Nagy, 1881-1952.

## GALLERY MATRIX

168 Commercial St. • 487-3435 • Daily 12n–4pm; 7pm–11pm & by appt.  
 Open weekends throughout the year • Director: David Simpson  
 A gallery featuring contemporary Provincetown and Lower Cape artists. Featuring  
 the work of John DiMestico, John Rogers, Marian Roth, Kim & Philippe Villard,  
 Michael Landis, Peter Flamondon, Donald Beal, Jack Louth, John Ruggieri, Kerry  
 Pease, Roz Smith & Grace Freundlich.

## HALCYON GALLERY

371 Commercial St. • 487-9415 • Open Daily All Year • Director: Suzanne Larsen  
 A gallery of Art to Wear, specializing in handmade clothing and jewelry by American  
 artists; featuring a discriminating collection of hand-blown glass and decorative  
 items.

## HARVEY DODD GALLERY

437 Commercial St. • 487-3329 • Daily 11am–11pm • Director: Harvey Dodd  
 A gallery of Dodd's expressive artwork in varied media, subject matter and  
 approach. The 35th season.

## IMPULSE

188 Commercial St. • 487-1154  
 Daily 10am–11pm • Director: Frederick D. Bayer  
 Contemporary American crafts including a nationally acclaimed selection of  
 kaleidoscopes, fine gold and silver "Art to Wear" jewelry and an autograph gallery  
 with signed celebrity photographs, letters and historical documents.

## JULIE HELLER GALLERY

2 Gosnold St. • 487-2169 • Across from Adams Pharmacy  
 Daily 11am–11pm & by appointment • Director: Julie Heller  
 A gallery dedicated to the artists who established Provincetown as an important  
 art colony: Avery, Lazzell, Nordfeldt, Moffett, Freedman\*, W. M. Chase, L'Engle\*,  
 Marantz\*, Bailey\*, Clymer\*, De Groot\*, Hofmann, Chaffee, Knaths, Dubs, Weinrich,  
 Hawthorne, Walkowitz, Hensche, Colebrook, Zorach and others. New works by  
 Bruce, DuToit, LaMotta, and Mockler. \*Estate representation.

## KENNEDY GALLERY

353 Commercial St. • 487-3896  
 Daily 10am–11pm • Director: Frederick H. Schulenberg  
 A collection of original watercolors and oil paintings by Robert E. Kennedy &  
 Michele Richard Kennedy. Also featuring paintings by Michael Mazzola, Raymond  
 Prosser, Mary Springer, Neil McAuliff, Arno Masters, & wood carvings by Daniel  
 Murphy. Special exhibitions.

## LLAMA GALLERY

382 Commercial St. • 487-2921  
 Open Daily in Season • Directors: JoAnn Eisemann, Elizabeth Flynn & Phil Gavorn  
 12th Season. A gallery of fine international folk art, Oriental rugs and kilims, jewelry,  
 tapestries & selected tribal works from Dogon, Yoruba, Kuba, Senufo, Ibo, Fang,  
 Baule and other major African tribes.

## LONG POINT GALLERY

492 Commercial St. • 487-1795 • Daily 11am–3pm;  
 8pm–10pm or by appointment • Director: Mary E. Abell  
 18th season featuring works by: Robert Beauchamp, Varujan Boghosian, Paul  
 Bowen, Fritz Bultman, Carmen Cicero, Gilbert Franklin, Sideo Frromboluti, Edward  
 Giobbi, Budd Hopkins, Leo Manso, Robert Motherwell, Paul Resika, Judith  
 Rothschild, Sidney Simon, Nora Speyer and Tony Vevers, and Honorary Member  
 Renate Ponsold.

## OPERA

167 Commercial St. • 487-2504 • Daily year round  
 Featuring the artwork of Jonathan Summit. A full service jewelry store displaying  
 the finest of European & American designers. Crystal by Baccarat, Hoya, LaLique,  
 Orrefors, St. Louis & Swarovski.

## PETER COES STUDIO GALLERY

25 Pearl St. • 487-1405 • Daily year-round: 11–3 & 7–11  
 & by appointment • Directors: Linda & Peter Coes  
 Exhibiting the nationally-known narrative paintings of Provincetown, Cape Cod  
 and the New England region by Peter Coes. The works show a keen interest and  
 knowledge of the architecture and landscape of the area as demonstrated in his  
 finely detailed paintings and sculpture. Meet the artist.

## PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION & MUSEUM

460 Commercial St. • 487-1750 • Director: Robyn Watson  
 Daily in July & August 12n–4 pm; 7pm–10pm  
 One of the foremost art museums in the country with a permanent collection of  
 regional art from the past 80 years. Organized in 1914. Special exhibitions, juried  
 shows, concerts, slide shows and other events throughout the year. Call for times.

## RICE/POLAK GALLERY

430 Commercial St. • 487-1052  
 Daily 11am–11pm • Directors: Marla Rice & Richard Polak  
 Representing over 100 contemporary American artists: paintings, assemblages,  
 graphics, photography & sculpture. Also one-of-a-kind works in glass and clay.  
 Special exhibitions by Olga Antonova, Peter Coes, Lois Griffel, Kristine Hopkins,  
 Ray Keyton, Ellen LeBow, Romanos Rizk, Karin Rosenthal, Jan Collins Selman,  
 T.J. Walton, Robin Winfield and many others.

## RISING TIDE GALLERY

494 Commercial St. • 487-4037 • Daily 12–5 & 7–10pm • Dir: Sara London  
 Openings Sundays: 6–8pm. Featuring the following contemporary artists from  
 Provincetown, Boston, Maine and New York: Anthony Fisher, Fred Garbers, Noa  
 Hall, Elspeth Halvorsen, Sidney Hurwitz, Peter Macara, Martin Mugar, Vita Petersen,  
 Jack Phillips, Michael Rogovsky, Michael Seccareccia, David Shainberg, Peter Sims,  
 Ellen Sinclair & Peter Watts. Works include oils, watercolors, prints, and box  
 constructions.

## WOHLFARTH GALLERIES

234 Commercial St. • 487-6569 • Daily May through October  
 Director: Lavinia Wohlfarth  
 Representing the students of the Cape Cod School of Art—past & present—in the  
 tradition of Charles Hawthorne & Henry Hensche . . . still life, landscape &  
 sculpture. Also showing selected Provincetown & Cape Cod artists.

by Jack Pierson & Richard McCann

For 20 years, David Armstrong has maintained ties with Provincetown while he has moved around the world, taking pictures. I first met him here in 1980, and even then he was a legend, in both Provincetown and downtown New York. For the past 10 years, I've had the pleasure of seeing his work evolve and gain the recognition it deserves. Most recently, his photographs appear with those of Nan Goldin in *A Double Life*, a collection which evidences the intersections of their lives and work over a period of years. Nearly everyone who sees David's work falls in love with both it and its subjects. The photos which appear here were taken in Provincetown in the late 1970s. On May 7, 1994, my friend Richard McCann and I had the following conversation as we looked through them.

—JACK PIERSON



EMILY

# PROVINCETOWN, LATE '70S: DAVID ARMSTRONG'S PHOTOGRAPHS

RICHARD: Was that one's youth? Waiting to be photographed? As if one imagined one should be still for a moment—while one was still young, I mean. JACK: One? Geez, I hope I get old enough to start referring to myself as "one." One what? One reader of Ronald Firbank? One dowager matron? RICHARD: Oneself, of course: one respectable middle-aged homosexual gentleman. Waiting. Longing. Isn't this what these photos refer to? As if one had time on one's hands. The blond hair on a boy's forearm. Blond hair on a boy's chest. Isn't this B.? You know, B. He lived for a while on Johnson Street with that guy who got hepatitis. I met him at the library while I was searching for some books. I said, "Here's my address. Stop by." Of course I never



GEORGE AT THE BOATSLIP

imagined he'd stop by; I imagined he was straight. But there he was an hour later, standing at my door on Pearl Street, holding a quart of beer. I was so shy I kept talking until 3:00 a.m. I thought I'd have to get to know his whole life story. Finally he asked if he could take a shower. When I picture him, he's still wearing the body he wore then, like a uniform. *Young B., from Canada, I think. First man I ever...* Of course a photograph is more than a pretext for some memory. What I admire is what resists me. JACK: Yeah—well, anyway, that's all fine, except this picture isn't B. It's that guy who works downtown. I'm all about the wallpaper myself. You can always find young boys in P'town, but that wallpaper—you just can't find it



JEFFREY



JENNY AT CAFÉ POYANT



PAULA AND ROB AT HERRING COVE



CAROLINE AT LANDS END INN PARTY



RICKI AT THE BOATSLIP

*anymore.* Look at this one. *Can you believe those cheap satin shorts?* Isn't that you in the background? That must be you, the way you're sucking up that drink. Thank God I never hung out at The Boat Slip—*much.* RICHARD: I lacked the courage. Men. Sex. I hung out with girls, browsing the gift shops on Commercial Street, wearing an Indian kurta. That was my "homosexual fate." JACK: You got off easy then, I'd say.

RICHARD: I got tattooed after I saw this girl's face. People ask me: *Were you in the Navy? Did you get those when you were drunk?* But I wanted to be marked, like this girl, in a way I could never disown. She is the most private person in this photograph, even though her face is all tattooed. JACK: You want this coupon? 40 cents off. RICHARD: No,

it's already used. I only paid \$2.10. JACK: I still see that tattooed girl at the A & P. She's around. RICHARD: Do you have the urge to lie when you look at these photos? I do. I want to say that I knew so-and-so, that so-and-so was my friend. As if that might explain my sadness, because the person is possibly dead. No, not him—not the guy with the hairy legs, not the guy whose dick is sheathed, like it will never die. And not that guy either, not the guy with the sunglasses hanging from his shirt. JACK: That's Max. RICHARD: He's not what I'd call *inconsolable*. Some of the others, maybe, but not him, showing off his belly. JACK: What a genius look, right? I worshipped Max. So did everybody though. He had this gorgeous way of speaking to every-

one exactly the same way. It didn't matter whether you were a tranny hooker or a chief justice. Max would still say, "Hey, girleen"—I wish I could be more like that. He was also the butchest fag I ever met and the first person I knew who was HIV-positive, even before you knew to say "HIV." It was like: *Oh, this guy has got AIDS.* I never knew he looked this cheap though. You can see David in the reflection in his sunglasses, the way David looked back then. RICHARD: Photography—"the world's saddest medium." JACK: "The only one that saves a homosexual's life." ■



PHILLIPE



MAX

**RICHARD:** Photography—"the world's saddest medium." **JACK:** "The only one that saves a homosexual's life."

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# The Sadness of Abstract Art: An Interview with JACK PIERSON

by Ann Wilson Lloyd

**J**ack Pierson, a Fine Arts Work Center fellow for 1993-94, had a solo show in April at New York's Luhring Augustine Gallery. It consisted of an installation-like grouping of drawings, his trademark found-letter phrases, a suite of oil-stick-on-paper abstract paintings in various shades of blue, blown-up photographs, and a tableau of a folding chair slung with a filmy blue shirt and surrounded by cigarette butts on the floor. At the time of this interview in May in Provincetown at his rented beach cottage off Route 6A, he was anticipating the installation of his own work with that of Edward Hopper at the Whitney Museum's lobby gallery, opening in June, 1994, as well as the publication of his first foray into high-fashion photography, a feature-length spread starring Naomi Campbell and commissioned by Harper's Bazaar, also to appear in June.

ANN WILSON LLOYD: Where did you grow up?

JACK PIERSON: Plymouth, Massachusetts.

AWL: You went to art school at Mass Art in Boston. Did you like it?

JP: I did pretty much. I had my problems with it, or I always felt like the grass was always greener. I had my circle of friends, I was in a very strange program called the Studio for Interrelated Media, which was basically performance, so it meant you could do anything, and I took all the liberties that that suggested. It was the one place you could be conceptual, but it implied the need for a lot of self-discipline and motivation, which I didn't really have, in those years. Like I was, your prototypical art school kid. I wanted to dress up and do kooky things, and have fun, and that's what I did. By the time I arrived in New York in 1983, I was 23, and it was the height of Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf, and they were all as old as me and already millionaires. I felt, like, *Where have I been?* It was ridiculous! And I spent the next seven years trying to catch up or get it together, or actually feeling completely like I had no place in everything that was going on. But you know, it suddenly changed, somehow.

AWL: When did that happen?

JP: I guess, the '90s sort of happened, and there was a backlash against the slick and the conceptual, which I liked, actually. Part of what I want in life is to be described, you know what I mean? Like that's what I live for somehow, a description, to tell myself what I am, or how the rest of the world is seeing it. So when I

started to get my first press it was very interesting. I loved that. I feel that's what I work for now.

AWL: Do you feel like it's part of your work, an extension or the completion of it?

JP: Yeah, it's like an intense need to have things described back to me. Initially they would describe it as if I had made a point to be contrary to what was going on, like Peter Halley and blah, blah, blah. And really I was just doing what I did. There was a big deal initially about my photographs being installed with just pins, instead of framed and mounted and made an object of. To me it wasn't a question of "I'm not going to do a mounted object because I don't like it," it was more like, "The most I can afford is the prints," and there was a big esthetic choice in using straight pins, rather than push pins. And I felt like I was creating the object I could with my means at that time. I had this whole idea of wanting everything you hung on the wall to be crucial to the work itself. And so the whole progression of my work is due to just, like, circumstances! I was always taking photographs. I had tons of photographs, and I could never figure out why. At school, you could have been an photographer, like Nic Nixon, and do this kind of thing where it's about the print, and its about the this, or the that. And I was like... [he sighs] I don't know. I couldn't see how mine fit in. 'Cause I was too all over the place. I didn't want

to do a whole portrait series of poor people. Meanwhile, lots of pictures in my early work are of poor people that I knew. I was one of them. Yet they had a kind of gorgeous glow to them. But I didn't want to do, like, "Oh! the poor people project!" At the same time I knew the art world didn't want big color pictures of young poor people, really.

AWL: But these were pictures of what was actually going on in your life?

JP: Right, and my life is so filled with delusions. At the time, I thought I was accruing these images so I could be a fashion photographer. I thought they looked so, like, glamorous.

AWL: A gritty glamour?

JP: Not to me, I was totally living out this fantasy of "It wasn't gritty." When they were reviewed, well, it wasn't even my review, but of Mark Morrisroe who I had this big connection with in Boston, and it described his work and it said, like, "the ravaged, worn faces of these pathetic tenement dwellers." I was like... "What do you mean?" I thought they were very glamorous, like beautiful dresses. The review was actually true, but—"Worn faces, and these dingy apartments!?" That apartment looked beautiful! I really thought these were high-fashion pictures. Meanwhile, fashion has come around exactly to where these were!

*Pierson describes his first studio show, seen by "five people I had managed to know," in New York in 1988 or '89: paintings and photographs "about the body—scars and tortured areas of flesh, paintings of bruises and pimples, porno images rephotographed from magazines," the production of which he financed with an \$800 line of credit from his first credit card.*

AWL: What insights did people have? Did they surprise you?

JP: Yeah, sort of. The thing I learned initially was that there was an intense spirituality that I wasn't considering. I considered everything for its glamour quotient. I don't only mean glamor in a sense of Hollywood glamour, I mean...

AWL: Nostalgic glamour?

JP: Or any kind of glamour.

AWL: Decadent glamour?

JP: Yeah, exactly. All the kinds of allusions. My whole modus of picture-making is to leave a trace of, like, an interesting life.

AWL: A theatricality?

JP: Sort of, yeah. Like, I just realized that as much as I change mediums, I change personalities. I'm always trying to fit in. So I'm intensely



Photograph by Jack Pierson

**Like that's what I live for, a description, to tell myself what I am, or how the rest of the world is seeing it. It's like an intense need to have things described back to me.**

narcissistic on the level of I know what certain things mean, and I know how you can, like, drop signifiers, and with the slightest trace of a signifier, people create a whole story. I know I do it. If I come into your house and turn over an ash tray and it says Hermes, I'm, like, "O-o-oh, so-o-o, she must be whatever, or, maybe, like a rich aunt gave it to her." You know there's a whole story to be made from every little thing, and that's what I feel I have put a frame around, in my pictures. Doesn't that look like *this*, doesn't *this* look like *that*. You know, one of my other big schemes that I never really accomplished was to totally set up social documentary pictures, which I'm not so sure isn't done, like Mary Ellen Mark. I tend to believe her, but she really goes out there. How did she get them so flawless? In a certain way I have done this, but I didn't actually schlepp the props and do all of it, but there was a certain kind of authenticity and glamour that I was going for.

**AWL:** Does real life ever disappoint you?

**JP:** Uh, real life disappoints me, but my photographs never do.

**AWL:** Does real life right now seem slightly beyond your dreams?

**JP:** It is. And so it brings out the whole element of what do you talk about in your work if you don't talk about despair. I am really happy these days. I'm extremely happy and grateful.

**AWL:** Is that why you remain out here, to get a grip on real life?

**JP:** To me, this is not that authentic. It's pretty nostalgic. This looks like a shack, but it's a shack I'm paying a good piece of change for. But most pictures I take away from here this summer, people will say, [his voice lowering theatrically] "O-o-oh, its like a worn-out shack, and blah, blah, blah." The work's at a funny stage right now. I can't make certain kinds of work that I used to.

*He talks about his next round of work after the body photographs, a series of 40 or 50 pencil drawings "that looked like something from a journal or a suicide note or a kidnapping thing," half of which his dealer Simon Watson immediately sold in Los Angeles.*

**AWL:** So it's the fantasy element you go for?

**JP:** Exactly, and in the photography, that winds up making a lot of people say, "Oh, these must be found!" Which I love! But they're not. There was the same quality in the drawings. "This look likes somebody was freaked out and thinking about killing themselves. This is the last trace,"

or something like that.

**AWL:** Were you a totally dreamy kid?

**JP:** Pretty much. And my dreams and fantasies went toward rock-and-roll and movies. That's where I thought it was happening. I still get really cut up with it to this day, even though I feel like it's getting less attractive to be an old person into rock-and-roll. But you know, this Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love thing, like, to me, it was—as tragic as it is—like, when he O.D.'d in Rome and then there was the picture of her in the back of the ambulance, I thought, "O—o-o-o-h! They are so-o-o-o-o lucky!" Just that phrase, "Kurt Cobain OD's in Rome on champagne and barbiturates, and Courtney Love's concerned," that takes me someplace, it is so literary! Like how did he windup ODing in Rome? Why not

### **REAL LIFE DISAPPOINTS ME, BUT MY PHOTOGRAPHS NEVER DO.**

Seattle? It was so like Marianne Faithful, being pulled out of the Stones' *mansion* on an *oriental rug*. That kind of stuff I just thrill to! Meanwhile, my life is kind of dreary. But I spend time trying to make it look like that. I mean I suppose now I could go up and know rock stars if I wanted to, but somehow I don't have that much gumption. I did that whole thing in art school. When I went to art school, the point wasn't to go to art school, it was to become a rock star, then when I saw what you really had to do, it just seemed like, "O-o-oh, God! I can't do this!" Or a film maker. My standard line is all this work is about being a failed filmmaker. Even though the whole mode among artists these days is directing, even as big a control freak as I am, I think I could never keep all that together. So I make stills from something that hopefully looks like a movie. All those things apply, the whole lie about found things, the whole lie about stills from a movie, like all that works. With this last show that I did, I could very happily and successfully have put out another 100 pencil drawings of squalor and sadness and people in the art world, they're very happy to have you do the same thing, but I'm more than a pencil now, I can afford expensive blue oil stick. Why not try to see what I can do with that. There was a certain amount of retreat involved in it. I felt really naked in public for the last three years, like, OK, you want to see how sad I am? I'm this sad. It was all true. All these, like, suicide note sort of things. So I felt laid bare: Here's what my life was like, every dingy room of it; here's what my thoughts were like, every pathetic, self-indulgent thing. And I was sick of a certain level of response

Marianne Faithful, being pulled out of the Stones' *mansion* on an *oriental rug*. That kind of stuff I just thrill to!

Meanwhile, my life is

only based on gut-wrenching emotionality. Everybody was concentrating on narrative, and how pure and honest the emotions are. I started to think, well what do I want now? I want people to know that I know what I'm doing, that I can really draw, and I think the paintings are good paintings. That's what I am now—an artist. And what does an artist do? But I'm still sort of like an artist acting the artist. OK, I will act like an artist now. An artist has oil paints.

**AWL:** So there's a little campiness to it.

**JP:** On a certain level, but the big surprise to me was—they're good, the paintings are good. Like, I thought I had figured out a way that they didn't have to be good, but they could still be like these things that artists make. The thing that surprised me is that I think they're good. And the other thing about them, they still remain mournful. I was doing this whole blue thing, like melancholy, blueness, rhythm-and-blues, rock-and-roll, sadness, the marks are all down the paper, like hands dragging down a wall, like, "Oh, [whispering] it will be really sad, like, that's what abstract art is, look how sad it is! Look how much emotion there is!"

**AWL:** Did it have anything to do with Provincetown?

**JP:** Oh, completely. It was part of the whole thing of "I'm an artist in Provincetown." I made a foray in between the sheer pencil drawings, and these, where blue started to be used to write words and send messages, that simple signifier. It's like, you know—a good color. Although you don't wind up seeing that much these days. There's a lot of blue in fashion, but, the other thing I thought about this show afterwards, is, it's so undecorative, because nobody has a house that blue really works well in.

**AWL:** Excerpt here, where the light is blue.

**JP:** It's extremely blue here. And I don't think the pictures I made would be the same if I wasn't here.

**AWL:** Roberta Smith, in the *New York Times* review of your Luhring Augustine show, thought the paintings were the most opaque. My immediate thought was that they were Provincetown blue-light paintings.

**JP:** They were. And that's what made me mad.

I was so stunned that somehow she didn't get it. The review started out great, and that's a traditional Roberta Smith form to do that, but why couldn't she have spent the last two sentences talking about the spiritual aspect of the whole show. I felt, "Oh God, was this a big mistake to do a really trippy spiritual show?"

**AWL:** I guess she isn't clued into Provincetown and that "spirit of the art colony" thing.

**JP:** I don't know. She knows that I've been up here all year. To tell you the truth, artists are the ones responding to the new blue work. All the artists get it. The artists tell me how good the painting is. To me it seems pretty clear and simple and direct. I thought that was an interesting point she made about the smoking hand and the filling of time.

**AWL:** Did you feel you were just filling time at the Work Center?

**JP:** No. I really enjoyed it. And what is anything, except filling time? You could say the same thing about Jackson Pollock. It must have taken him a while, but I guess my paintings look quicker than Jackson Pollock's. I can't tell whether mine look quick. Like, "How long does it take him to do that, like half an hour?" At a certain level, they all function as prayers to me, at a very gut level. That's how I began.

**AWL:** Tell me about the Whitney show. You mentioned you were aiming for a Cape Cod thrift-shop motif.

**JP:** I selected works out of their collection of Hoppers, a lot of drawings, early work, and few masterpieces, because the whole point of the show is to show their Hoppers rather than to show me. This is a nice way to put them on and be a little bit kicky at the same time. When we sat down to talk about my whole concept, it was, "Well, you know, everyone knows what Hoppers look like. We'll just put a few of them up and I'll, like, pack it with my work." And they're, like, "Uhm, well, no!" [He laughs.] I just thought, like, how many more times do we have to see "Sunday Morning." [He laughs again.] So now it's lots of both. I'm doing an installation for the middle of the room, a kind of tableau, about nine by 12. It will imply a rented room, a specific one to me.

**AWL:** From Provincetown?

**JP:** No, from Miami Beach. That's where I came into my own, after art school. After my initial foray into New York, I went to Miami to start a new life—I didn't go to start a new life, I went on vacation and ran out of money and wound up there.

**AWL:** Will it look like a Hopper scene?

**JP:** It does. That's my big stance on the show. I feel the show is about me being a subject of one of his paintings more than it is about me being like a latter-day peer. I mean that's just my little cute way of dealing with it. The show isn't about pointing out formal similarities, except that as artists, we both like formalized

## "Room for rent, ocean view, bedroom, bath, inquire within." To me, that was like a completely spiritual thing.

emotion so much that that's where the formal qualities will resonate, on the emotional level. Rather than, "Oh, their mark-making is so similar, blah blah, blah." And I'm trying not to make it like, "Look isn't this photograph just like this painting?" This installed piece will float in the middle of the room, and then around the edges will be all this work, work they would never show off his, 'cause it's a student thing or an illustration he did for a book, and there's work you wouldn't expect to find an artist like me putting in, like early little bedraggled work I did in 1984.

**AWL:** So it's another laying bare kind of thing?

**JP:** Yeah, I'm allowing it to not be tight. And of course, I know the whole thing will wind up being incredibly tight. That's how I wind up doing things. It's, like, the graphic designer in me, and it's either a great plus or a great disadvantage. 'Cause a lot of people felt like the show was so tightly nailed down to an inch of itself. But I think it's such a good new way to look at installing.

**AWL:** You just go with lots of work and put it where it goes?

**JP:** Exactly. I tend to operate a lot by chance and hope for the best. I'm doing that with the Whitney show.

**AWL:** And that's what's getting the museum nervous?

**JP:** Well, it doesn't get them nervous, it just gets me like, "Oh God! Why do I have to figure out all this now? Why did I have to promise to hang all these? What if at the last minute I don't think it's, like, good?" But that's a new level to work with that I will, hopefully, conquer.

**AWL:** When did you start making the painted signs—were those triggered when you came to Provincetown?

**JP:** Yeah. I just did those here. They've never been seen in New York but there's going to be one in the Whitney which will gratify me on a certain level.

**AWL:** The hand-lettered signs that people hang around here are great. They have such odd word groupings and phrasings. And the colors too, like they use whatever paint was in the shed.

**JP:** Right, I was completely inspired. My whole UFO Gallery show in 1993 was all about that. People had reactions to that show I've heard since, like, "Was that supposed to be some slap

in the face to Provincetown?" I was like, "No!" I thought it was like a complete celebration. I loved that one little sign, the only one that wound up selling, the one that said, "Hi. Who me? I'm a lace-capped hydrangea." That sign is in front of a guest house every summer and every summer I think, "This is just too much! It's so-o-o-o genius." It wasn't a slap in the face, it's completely paying homage to whoever does that. Some of them were made up, sort of. I have whole issues with that, 'cause I hate to find myself making a found object. But on another level, if I can do it, real-ly good, why not? And I did all those lobster paintings, and these are other things nobody ever sees in New York. I'm just doing it here, you know, 'cause I can and why not? On the other hand, it's like, how can I do these lobster paintings? What for? Why?

**AWL:** Did they sell here?

**JP:** None of that stuff from that show sold. It was a big disappointment to the gallery, I think, but I liked them, and now I'll feel vindicated when one of them is in the Whitney! There was one sign in that show I just worshipped. It just said, "Room for rent, ocean view, bedroom, bath, inquire within." To me, that was like a completely spiritual thing. Like when I see it on the street in real life, oh my God, it just says it all! There's no sense of parody to me, it's just, like, "Wow, this is so good." Just like the lace-capped hydrangea thing, it strikes me as so, like, intensely psychedelic, and trippy!

**AWL:** Are you concerned these might not travel well to New York, to the Whitney?

**JP:** Not really. When you get to a place like this, an artists' colony, it tends to be that you put people in a situation and everybody gets so into it that all the work starts including sand and glass and bits of broken driftwood. That was my big fear, because I'm like completely susceptible to that. "Oh no! What if I show up in New York and everything's got a driftwood frame on it!" But I don't feel like I succumbed, I don't allow that much of it in, and you know, why shouldn't it, to a certain extent? When I was in the city and I was unhappy and uptight and freaked out, and drank too much, and smoked lots of cigarettes, and the work was stuff about that. Believe me, I'm a good enough actor and technician that I could still make work right here that looks like I'm in my Times Square studio. But, like, why?

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**ANN WILSON LLOYD** is a free-lance critic who writes for *Art in America*, *Sculpture*, *Art New England*. She is an associate editor of *Provincetown Arts*.



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# CANDY JERNIGAN

by Alec Wilkinson

**C**andy Jernigan died from an illness in the spring of 1991. She was, so far as I know, 39 years old. I knew her for the last 13 years of her life. She grew up in Miami when it was a Jewish more than a Spanish city, and she had a childhood that was bizarre and exotic and harrowing—she was about 20 when she was standing in the kitchen one afternoon and heard, from the yard, the shot from the gun that her father had held to his head. As a young woman, she was given to making callous and spiteful remarks, suddenly and without warning, and she meant them to hurt you. She wanted, much of the time, I think, to be left alone, but she was too attractive for that ever to happen. She had a small, heart-shaped face and lips that she often colored a violent shade of red, and when some belligerent remark came out of her mouth she seemed (to me anyway) a little dangerous. I was always thrilled by her company and nervous about what she might say. She had wide, soft cheekbones, one slightly more pronounced than the other, and she wore red glasses that concealed them, so that she looked like a different person when she took off the glasses. Sweet-natured and a little bit shy and undefended is what she looked like without her glasses. She had a tattoo on one shoulder and another on her wrist—what they were of I no longer remember, a heart with wings, perhaps. She had dark hair that she sometimes wore to her shoulders, and sometimes cut in a line along the bottom of her cheeks. She was slender and busty and swaggered a bit when she walked, usually in heels—she was the only woman I ever saw

in heels in the winter in Provincetown. She often wore tights and short dresses you could see through when the light was behind her, and a short fur one winter that made her shoulders seem as wide as a billboard. I would see her walking along Commercial Street in that big coat on the arm of her boyfriend, and I would feel that I had seen a figure of some glamour. She would come to work—we both worked at the Art Association—and open the *Daily News* and for breakfast drink two cans of Coke and smoke several cigarettes. Her manner was always sulky. When I see pictures of her now from that time I can hardly believe how beautiful she was.

We fell into some degree of friendship immediately, since we both spent nearly all of our time at the Art Association avoiding work. She

would borrow my car on the pretense of "going to see the printer" with an invitation to an opening, or an announcement of a show—she was responsible for designing them—and then she and her boyfriend would disappear for about as long as it would have taken to reach Boston and return.

Everyone else went running around Provincetown that winter saying that the novel they were writing, or the play they were in, or the painting or the drawing or the sculpture they'd finished, or the dance they were composing was terribly important and had to be seen, and part of a new direction for them, and probably the finest work of its kind being done anywhere in America. Candy withdrew when these conversations were taking place. I never heard her boast. She worked at home, often in her bed-



CANDY JERNIGAN, Photo by Norma Holt

## "Her red glasses and black dresses"

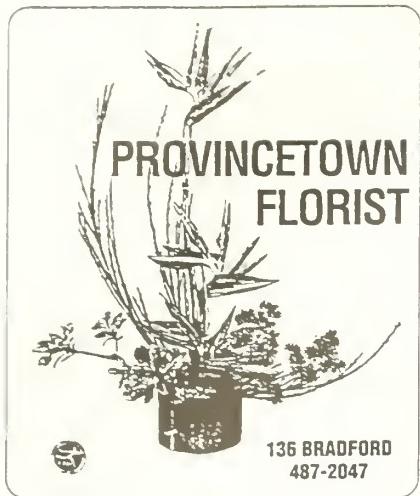
by Louis Postel

CANDY SURFACED PROFESSIONALLY with me at the end of the earth, P-town. She became the art director for the magazines I began publishing in 1974, *Provincetown Poets* and *Provincetown Magazine*. We wanted to re-invent magazines. Never hippies, no longer vagabonds. She from Florida broken home. Me from mine. Putting things together, testing our abilities. Now, me, her former employer having some

kind of claim to her future success, which I expected. Her enormous funny talent and modesty. Her red glasses and black dresses. Her sweet way of mixing trash and high culture. Her ironic, sad drawings: if you don't laugh, you'll cry. Maybe these pictures are caught in such a rush of life there is no time for either. When I moved to New York, she was living on potato soup at Sunny Tasha's. She said, no, I'll stay here in P-town. Six months later I bumped into her on Second Avenue. She was living in a very grim,

junkie-assaulted apartment with her parrot, Jack, who made a mess that was melancholy as a circus. Jack was a her. Candy was a big reader. She read Italo Calvino, then began designing book jackets. On a plane back from England she got chased around the aisles by some guy. For safety landed in a seat next to Philip Glass. Knew all his music. Later married him. ■

LOUIS POSTEL is the publisher of *Design Times* magazine.



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room, with rock and roll music playing. She kept an obnoxious parrot named Jack, and the bird shrieked while the music played. What she would show you, if you asked, and you usually had to ask more than once—there was nothing in her of the self-promoter—were studies, or landscapes, or cartoons, or drawings that were advanced in their technique and sometimes angular and hard and sometimes lyrical and always had a mournful quality. A very small figure in the center of a landscape, sometimes with his back to the viewer or his face concealed by the brim of his hat. A still life on a table, the objects so modest and so far toward the background that they seemed like a destination on a plain. Her work was full of color; she liked Matisse, I think. She was prolific, she experimented a lot, and nothing ever seemed to defeat her. She often found things to admire in work that I thought had no value. When she did I looked at the work again or thought about the person in another way.

When I moved to New York, in 1979, she told me, as a kind of going-away remark flung in my direction, "I've never known anyone who left Provincetown for New York and made a success of it." I sat one evening looking out the high window of my apartment at rain on Mulberry Street and thought that the way that the shiny surface of the pavement reflected the red and green of the traffic lights reminded me of lights in a crayon drawing I had bought from Candy before I left. The drawing portrayed the facade and parking lot of a nightclub by the side of a road in Florida. The nightclub was called Pete's Lounge. There were some palm trees. The sky was black around the building that contained the club, and there was a slight blur to the lettering, as if the scene had been observed from the corner of the eye of a person passing at night in a car. A person who had something else on her mind, but whose intelligence was keen enough to register details to which it was paying only half attention. I meant to call her and tell her that something I had seen from the window of my apartment made me think of her and her work and that I thought she should move to New York, but I didn't. My intentions had been partly sentimental and affectionate and partly malicious. I wanted her to know that I was taking note of the city, while she was still looking at fishing boats in the harbor; I had been hurt by her predicting I would fail. A few days later she called and said she was living in Brooklyn, near Pratt. When I saw her she looked like Miami Beach, bright red glasses and flowery skirt and henna in her hair.

She worked for a while as the art director for

a company producing the most candid kind of pornographic magazines that you can still buy on a newsstand; on the masthead she called herself Cindy Jeroniga. Eventually I began receiving invitations to shows of her work. She began to design sets for a dance company, and covers for dozens of books, including two of my own, one of which she drew the cover for. It pleased me to think of my life as a series of books I would write and that Candy would design covers for.

I loved her as a friend to whom you could tell anything. She had worked hard in the last years of her life to face some of her darker pre-occupations. She had trouble sleeping. She would wake, she told me, and sit alone in the living room of her house and read in the middle of the night. Sometimes she felt afraid to leave the room, she said. At the same time, she had become more courageous. I did not any longer worry about having her turn on me. Her heart had grown much larger. She had become a deeply sympathetic person. I knew she would understand the anxiety I was describing when I talked intimately about troubles I had that I would have felt shy to tell any other friend. She was living with a man she loved, and would marry shortly before she died, and she was happier than she had ever been.

And then we had lunch, in the winter, somewhere near the Bowery, in a small, narrow, dark bar that served Southern food, and she told me she had been feeling poorly and was tired all the time and had been to several doctors and an acupuncturist, but no one had any idea what was wrong. I didn't see her for several months. I was working in the Midwest, and she had a collapse, and by the time I got back she was gone.

You never replace someone you love who is lost. For a while I would think that I saw her among crowds on the street. The slender woman with her hand in the air for a taxi. The woman stepping through the revolving door in Saks. The dark-haired woman in the restaurant with her back to me. The reflection in the store window of the woman with the black leather coat and dark glasses. When I think about her now I feel a contraction in my chest. I do not expect to meet anyone like her ever again. ■

**ALEC WILKINSON**, a staff writer for the *New Yorker* since 1980, is the author of five books, including *Midnights: A Year with the Wellfleet Police* and most recently *A Violent Act*.



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## PROTEAN SELF

by John Briggs

DAVID SHAINBERG'S LIFE'S WORK was understanding and illuminating the problems and potential transformation of consciousness.

In the early years of his career, he carried out his investigation through the profession of psychiatry. In later years, he did it as a painter. The two were entirely congruent.

I first met David in the winter of 1970 when my father, a psychiatrist himself, took me to a brownstone on East 95th Street in New York for a meeting of the staff of a new journal David was founding for the American Academy of Psychoanalysis. David was eager to bring some radical revelations about consciousness to the psychiatric profession.

*The Academy*, as he called the newsletter, did just that, introducing readers to the ideas of holistic quantum theorist David Bohm, Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti and to the emerging enthusiasm (now an established part of our culture) about Eastern and shamanistic mysticism and altered states of awareness. Shortly after I began to work with him on *The Academy* as its managing editor, I edited his book, *The Transforming Self: New Dimensions in Psychoanalytic Process*, which was published in 1973.

In that book David set out insights he would develop the rest of his life in papers, talks, dialogues, and unfinished book manuscript—and in the literally hundreds of paintings and drawings he completed in the decade after he quit his analytic practice.

The title of his book, *The Transforming Self*, was an accurate metaphor for David's whole approach to consciousness and self.

David viewed the self as a continuously emerging form rather than the expandable, long-term entity portrayed by modern psychology. One image he used, borrowed from Bohm, was the individual as a vortex in the stream of human consciousness—the self as a "fluctuating presence." He argued that our problem is that consciousness has played a trick on itself, cre-



ating the illusion that it is the self producing thoughts rather than thoughts that generate the self. He considered this illusion a very dangerous one that led to others.

In his writing, David drew an important distinction between a healthy, creative human consciousness and the pathological forms of consciousness he encountered as a psychiatrist. He made a significant, though generally unrecognized, contribution to psychiatric understanding by showing that most, if not all types of mental pathology are rigid forms of self that block the ongoing integration of consciousness with its environment.

One summer in the mid-1980s during my annual visit to David's house on Slough Pond in Truro I asked him to help me on a book I was writing by applying his approach to the persistent myth that creativity and psychopathology (inspiration and madness) are closely related to one another, even identical. One mellow Cape Cod afternoon after he had finished painting we sat in sunchairs on his deck overlooking the pond and far-off dunes—beyond which lay the ocean—and I set out the tape recorder. The dome of his forehead glowed softly in the milky light and his forearms and hands still bore a few daubs of paint. The spatters of paint which cov-

ered the floor of his studio, his running shoes, his clothes and the exposed parts of his body (especially his ears which he somehow missed when he washed up) always seemed to me a testimony to his complete immersion in his work and his impatience to be moving on. It seemed to fit with the fact that he ate meals faster than anyone I've ever known, not as if late for an appointment but as if bursting through the inertia of one place into a new direction. As we talked he occasionally struck suddenly at a mosquito on his forehead with the flat of his palm as if just coming to an idea. In our talks his playful smile was always there, especially when he was stepping into someone else's process to see where it led. I reported this exchange in my book, *Fire in the Crucible*:

**DS:** Let's take psychosis as an extreme example of pathology, one that's often associated with creativity. One of the basic things that distinguishes psychotic perception and creative ones is the ability to test reality. The psychotic organizes his anxiety around one interpretation. He says, "They're poisoning me." He reads every aspect of reality to fit that.

*The creator, on the other hand, knows to expect places where his creative interpretation doesn't work.*

**DS:** More than that, in a state of omnivalence [a state in which the creator senses the immensity of multiple meanings and perceptions all existing together], you see that nothing works. There are things that imply working, that's all. I think omnivalence is the basic human state, a condition which we usually try to ignore. But if you're a creator, you don't ignore it. Your desire is to organize that omnivalence. But when you organize one part, you immediately have a relationship between that part and the whole rest of the universe. It draws you on. Compare that movement with the psychotic person who says, there's nothing else but this part. He refuses to see there's more, because anything else makes him anxious . . . I think we're all somewhat psychotic to the degree that we believe our world is complete.

David envisioned that a possible antidote to the illusions of consciousness and traps of the rigid self was a state of conscious awareness in which the observer recognized that it was what it observed. Perhaps for that very reason he gravitated naturally to making works of art—because art re-entangles (or rediscovers the entanglement) of observer and observed. He had speculated that we might experience a new kind of harmony with our environment if we could deeply grasp (which is to say, if consciousness could grasp) that the separation of subject and object is at best a momentary convenience and never an absolute fact. His paintings, with their environmental colors, were reminiscent of

## "I'll see you in two weeks"

by Sideo Fromboluti

gleams pulled from sunsets, forests, cloudy skies—abstract movements sprawling in objectless layers, waves and bursts of integrating energy. This work reflects the spontaneous, creative sort of harmony he envisioned. He wrote in *The Academy* to his psychiatric colleagues:

In the painting process I have found an opportunity to constantly challenge the nature of consciousness. For example, I see a tendency to become fixed into believing that a particular form, a particular color relationship, is sufficient. I see myself falling into satisfactions and attempting to paint pictures that match specific forms I recall from masters I admire. I most vividly become aware of these tendencies to get fixed or to imitate another when I look around the room or take a walk: I take another look at the picture and even though I might just the moment before have felt it was perfect, it now is apparent that it doesn't work. In an instant I see that the pattern of settling on a set of perceptions has blocked my view of the whole picture. I see the pleasure I took in a set; I see that I continued with it because the feeling of closure was so pleasant. In that instant, however, I see that I had not seen the painting and that there are many more aspects to it than I thought. I see new possibilities in the painting and feel connected to something larger than the painting.

I remember a night two summers ago driving to Provincetown with David and his wife, Catherine, and sitting in the glassed dining room at Pucci's on the bay. The tide was out. Tidal pools gleamed on the flats and the light on the houses along the rim of the bay was opalescent. I listened as David and Catherine carried on a quiet and somehow incredible conversation about the light in Provincetown and how he wanted to paint in that light. Outside I saw—the light upon the houses, the kids inspecting the tidal pools, the driftwood and tilted boats on the flats, the tops of distant dunes—an evening of solid transparency. We all knew then that he was sick: a runner who sat zazen and watched his breath, a man who had frequently written about the lungs as a metaphor for the complete integration of life. An auto-immune disease of the lung had begun to choke off his breath. It was ironic. But in his philosophy reality was inherently ironic. Catherine knew then he was dying and I was in the mode of avoiding that particular uncertainty. Nevertheless, I think that in that light I sensed his mortality. It was there in the patient and abiding light which he said with his wonderful enthusiasm that he loved and was greedy to paint. ■

**JOHN BRIGGS**, a professor of English at Connecticut State University and the New School for Social Research in New York, is the author of four books including *Fire in the Crucible* (St. Martins).

**T**his man was sometimes a psychiatrist, sometimes an artist. The one field requiring analysis, the other intuitive vision. One involved with humanity, reaching out to aid one's fellow man, the other self-searching, hoping that through knowing the self a contribution can be made to society. To live by such a pattern is burdensome. Add to this an intensity of purpose, and we have David Shainberg before us.

Before coming to art David was a respected professional who did not need to cast about. His office on Park Avenue was busy. Three books on psychiatry written by him sat on his shelves. Yet, for the last eight years of his life, courageously, as if facing the devil, he crossed over and painted passionately. He was indomitable. Where men's feet stuck fast, he plowed through. He burned with a quest to know, his mind forever churning with questions about what makes us tick. His wondering brought him into many philosophical areas, among them Hindu religion, yoga, and meditation. I cannot help but think of the humanitarian in Van Gogh, who, at the outset, wanted to be a missionary. He went out to help the poor, the potato eaters, a kind of psychiatrist, sympathizer, or aid to people with problems. The Dutchman never thought of painting until all avenues led him to it. God has made only one Van Gogh, but David has a kinship with his spirit.

Two ingredients are necessary to make a painting: feeling and analysis. One is the emotional force that speaks to you, the observer, the other is the structure the artist uses to make the painting speak. In time, I believe, these two needs dissolve and become intuition, a form of buried knowledge which rises to surprise the artist. For years David and I met every two weeks and I looked forward to these visits to his studio. Each time I was barraged with dozens of paintings, some covering the walls, some stacked waiting to be discussed. We had a wonderful time attacking the do's and don'ts. He had attached himself to the abstract expressionist school, a natural choice, with its attitudes of total release, one to one encounter with the canvas, and the free flow between you and it, leading to unforeseen discoveries. Magnificent colors, red, blue, green, yellow, the whole spectrum, poured vigorously from his brush. Strange configurations loomed under the crusty surface.

He craved the new and fresh and was thrilled by what his imagination revealed.

Dip yourself into his paintings and the expressive painter is present. I, as a painter, consider this a contribution. I sense his journey. The last four years of his life he suffered an incur-

able lung problem. A non-smoker, he told me in non-medical terms, "The body sometimes turns on itself and there is nothing I can do." His bright colors took on a disturbing quality and some of the forms rising out of the paint were frightening. Undaunted he painted until he was taken to the hospital. I hope I could be as brave and dedicated under such pressure. Only a week before he went off to die he was discussing changes he meant to make on several canvases. The last time we met I said to him, "I'll see you in two weeks." He answered, "Maybe we should make it sooner." ■

SIDEO FROMBOLUTI is a painter who exhibits at Long Point Gallery in Provincetown.

## A Painter's Lament

for David Shainberg

by Joan McD Miller

I know that work will save me  
but first I want to paint  
the inside of my house white,  
the chairs, the floors, the mirrors,  
everything a continuous white  
and out doors everything green,  
the houses, the tree trunks, the roads.  
Then I'll dip a brush in black  
and on all that white a gesture,  
a statement you can't miss,  
and on all that green I'll spill  
a bucket's worth of red and  
it will settle there as if it belongs.  
That's what I want,  
a black mark to say I am  
and a red splash to say I am a part  
of everything that falls apart.  
Then I will go to work  
with pale pinks and burnt oranges  
and not worry that form always misses the point.

JOAN MCD MILLER is an artist who has been writing poems about artists.

# EDDIE

by Michael Lee

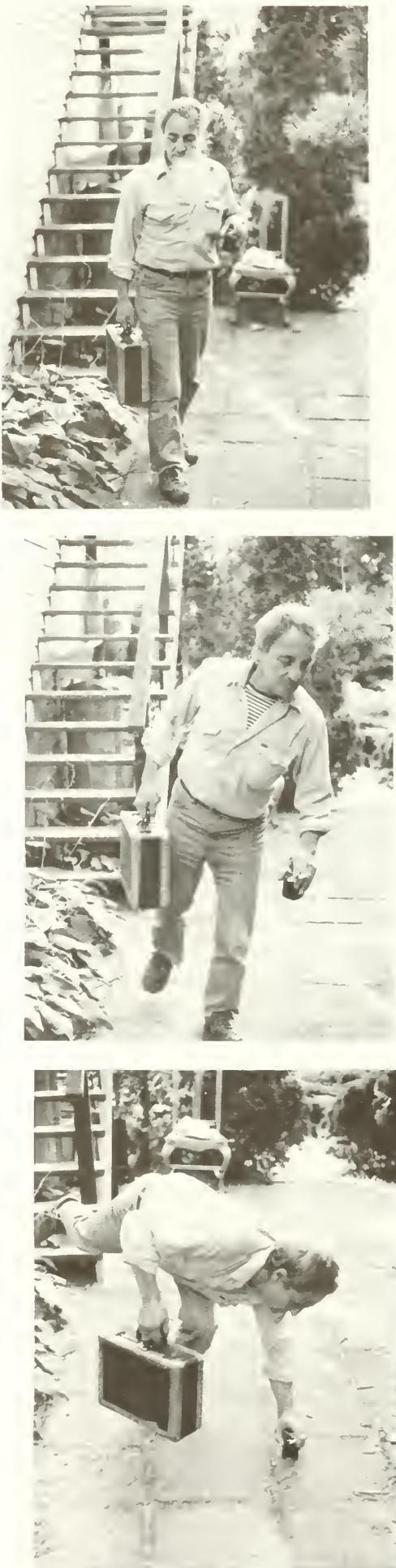
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LYNNE BURNS

**T**he first time I meet Eddie in 1978 I want to fight him. Six or seven of us share a big house in Wellfleet off the highway. While the peepers chatter in the wetland on the edge of the property, we're into our third party of the week. Eddie is perched on a bar stool in the middle of our kitchen, his face fuzzy from wine and pot. But his body is poised to answer the bell for another round. Forget he's drinking my wine, forget he's draped all over my date. He has that fuck-you look that other volatile drunks take as a challenge. I hear him saying to her, "Right now, at this moment, you and I are the *only* ones in this room, the only people on earth. Look at me—the only ones." My girl friend looks like she's listening to Svengali and suddenly I don't want to fight him any more. I have to love a guy who can get away with that.

We meet officially at one of Pete Frawley's parties a few months later. Eddie doesn't remember me and that girl friend I had is long gone. "Pete tells me you write. It's got to be the most important thing to you," he says, as if we're the only two people on earth.

We become friends and Eddie visits daily. I see him marching through the snow up the hill, carrying his ubiquitous briefcase, a banged-up, scruffy box held together by duct tape. His work is never farther away than the length of his arm. We spend these slow gray mornings talking about writing and drinking coffee until we're both twitching. Eddie's perpetual cigarette fills the kitchen with a low cloud of smoke. His phrase for facing the blank page is "shaking hands with the devil," but sometimes the devil's grip is so firm he doesn't face the page. He works slowly, painfully, an end-of-sentence revisionist who doesn't go on to the next sentence until the one he's working on has the cadence and clarity he wants. Confidence in the work has to be achieved daily, which is why writers drink a lot, he tells me, pouring the first wine of the day.

After making one of life's end-of-an-era decisions—"I got too comfortable"—Eddie leaves the Cape, and soon his visits are less frequent. He moves in with old friends, Dick and Doris Goodwin, living in a carriage house on their property in Concord, then eventually winds up back in the house where he grew up in Savin Hill, a working-class suburb of Dorchester, with his aging mother. He sets up shop in his childhood bedroom and continues his search for the right words. We see each other sporadically and only when I come up to meet him at his water-



ing hole, Bulldogs, in Savin Hill. But we talk on the phone once a week and I send him stories that we hash over. He complains about his novel, the agony of it and how consumed he is with finishing it. "What's the rush, Eddie?" I ask him, knowing he can spend a week on a short paragraph. "No rush, really," he says. "Except for the cancer."

Eddie's in tough shape now and asks Pete Frawley to take him to the oncologist. They wait in a room with others who are filled with doom. When Eddie's name is called he stands up and hands Frawley his briefcase. Frawley shakes his head. "I'm not taking responsibility for that, Eddie," he says, remembering Hadley losing Hemingway's trunk, loaded with work. Eddie follows the nurse toward the examining room. She asks him what's in the briefcase that's so important and Eddie turns toward the patients, holds the case up for all to see, and says, "Plans for the next war."

When the phone buzzes in my ear, I'm scared. We both know this is a goodbye call.

"How are you?" he asks. "How's Kathy?" "Great," I say.

"Marriage is a dangerous business for a writer," he says. "But I think it might work for you." He likes my wife because they sing Billie Holiday songs together so well it can break your heart if it's late enough in the evening.

"So, Eddie, how are you?"

Eddie chuckles into the phone. "I couldn't go but maybe three rounds."

"Eddie, I just want you to know what a difference you made."

"I didn't do shit," he says. "You're the one who picked up the pen and started working."

"I love you, Eddie," but my voice cracks.

"Well, that's different," he says. "I love you too." ■

**MICHAEL LEE** is a Wellfleet writer who teaches fiction at Cape Cod Community College in Hyannis.

**On Eddie's first collection of stories:**

I WOULD EXPECT that an Indian carving a totem would give attention to each cut of his knife, and offer a prayer for every stroke that went with the grain and another for each chip across the grain. So it is with Edward Bonetti's work. He reminds me of Hemingway and Steinbeck. His material is his own (what material!), but there is the same sense of a workman's heart full of awe, dread, and private joy in every fearful word set down forever (what a grave act!) upon the page. I love this collection piece by piece and taken all together. I also think *The Wine Cellar*, but itself, is a work about Italians living in America that begins where *The Godfather* ends. This is not small praise, but then not all prose partakes of the breath of the author's life.

—NORMAN MAILER, 1977



At Eddie's memorial at the Beachcomber's in Provincetown, August, 1993  
above: Norman Mailer and Richard Goodwin  
below: Michael Lee reading



**POEM**

*There is no central mourner  
when the good poet dies,  
but in his dying  
you become him  
and feel the pain he felt,  
and for a while  
the memory of him  
will rob you of your pleasures.*

—EDWARD BONETTI

**A COURTESY,  
A TRENCHANT GRACE**

for Jim Giumentaro (1959-1992)  
and for Terry Pitzner

Leaving you,  
Knowing you would likely die  
While I was away,  
Made me recall  
The photographer's tale,  
How he ventured into a realm  
Of monkey temples, rickshaws,  
River-pilgrims, ghats,  
The numinous city of Benares,  
And discovered an urchin  
Toppled in a clamorous street:  
No one would touch him;  
Not one among the merchants  
Or mendicants.  
He lifted the dust-checkered child,  
Swabbed his hands, the russet  
Planet of his face.  
You understand,  
The photographer was a man  
Annealed by war,  
Inured to suffering,  
Yet at having to leave  
The frayed child  
Only rupees, a little food,  
He felt his surgeon's soul unclapped.

But on his return  
The following day, he found  
The boy of the holy, moribund flesh,  
The threadbare boy,  
Upright;  
The city of ash and fervent pilgrim's prayer  
Seemed unstainable then,  
The yogi's poise by the river  
More radiant—

Jim, once we lay in the lee  
Of the plague's unblooming  
Gusts and battleground,  
On a calm bed,  
The gift which at the very last  
Had to stand for  
All my allegiance,  
My living arms' goodwill:  
I cradled you,  
Mindful of your shingles,  
Let you doze  
For an unhaggard hour:  
I was giving you my bed  
To die in.  
And in my grief and will  
To absolution for what seemed  
My gargantuan failure  
To keep you alive,  
It was as if I was fashioning  
An inmost shrine,  
An evensong to be stationed  
Wherever on this earth  
A courtesy, a trenchant grace  
Is enacted  
In the smallest gesture:  
Soup spoon tucked  
Under a lesioned lip,  
Palm-and-lotion laving  
A wand-lean leg;  
Above the intravenous tube,  
Or through a martyrdom of flies,  
A true and level gaze  
Is manna,  
In laboring hospices,  
In compassionless, dusty streets,

In the sacred city of Benares.

**SUNG FROM A HOSPICE**

Still craving a robust  
Tenderness and justice,  
I will go on living  
With all I have seen:  
Young men scoured  
And lusterless;  
Against my blind cheek—  
*Blessed be the fragible*  
*And dying.*  
*The irreplaceable dead—*  
In my crestfallen arms,  
With breath,  
Then without it,  
With flesh,  
Then freed of it—

And the indurate man I heard  
Condemn the stricken,  
While my cousin was dying,  
If he had walked these wards,  
Armorless, open  
to the imperiled,  
Surely he would have gleaned  
To sit in judgment  
Is to sit in hell—

Lesions, elegies,  
Disconnected phones—

Rain, nimble rain,  
Be anodyne,  
Anoint me  
When I say outright:  
*In the plague time, my heart*  
*Was tested,*  
*My living soul*  
*Struck like a tower bell,*  
*Once, twice,*  
*Four times in a single season.*

**A SHADRACH CHORUS**

for Susan Griffin  
and in memory of  
Charlotte Solomon

1

Through avenues of immeasurable burning,  
Fire beyond belief,  
Fire unabated,  
In beleaguered  
Dresden-become-a-pyre,  
She found herself allied  
With a lion licked by flames,  
Soot-streaked, tawny monarch,  
Exiled from a cindered zoo—  
The two, war-cornered king  
And consort,  
Spurred to the salve-cool  
River for refuge—  
Maunderers unaware  
This fist-fast vehemence,  
This crucible is called  
A firestorm:  
This pleading for an allaying  
Mother of water.

2

Because he heard pleading  
From the battlefield's red vandalism  
For two confounding days,  
An unreachable, bell-clear cry.

Because 1917, a carnage  
Gravid with gas-masks,  
Droves of greatcoats,  
Crushed whole fields and meadows  
Of his memory.

Because he caught  
In the moribund calls  
Of unraveling soldiers  
High notes deemed  
Impossible for men to make:  
Wracked the warriors with the tree-tall  
Crests of coloraturas.

This is how the stretcher-bearer became  
A maestro of voice.

3

He is here again,  
Her maestro and lover,  
Amid the mud-drenched days,  
The babel of the barracks,  
Where she isn't even a name,  
Where she isn't even  
Charlotte Solomon  
Of the bold self-portraits,  
But digits in skin.

He is here,  
Invisible in Auschwitz,  
Saying *Even if your voice cracks . . .*  
*Coaxing Go ahead, Charlotte,*  
*Explore the cracks,*  
And inside her demeaned,  
Supernumerary flesh,  
She is marshalling  
Her cabaret frankness,  
Her trenchant colors,  
Against a fearsome web  
Of family suicides,  
And she is singing as she daubs  
The elating brush,  
Alive to the fissures,  
Unabashed.

4

And when his plague-weary love  
Tried to hasten closure  
With a clothesline noose,  
Against the coma's palisades,  
Emilio began to sing,  
With all his being,  
Once-unknowable notes,  
And with his hospice acapella,  
Rolled the stone away—

Never knowing he was one  
With the shell-shocked maestro,  
The painter behind thorny wire,  
Singing a bit  
As she relinquished her sketch  
For a thimbleful of thread;

On with the Shadrach girl  
On the riverbank,  
Whose sound arcs  
Above spellbinding, obliterating flames:  
A girl with the cataract grief  
Of a lion;  
A lion with the treble wail  
Of a trembling girl—

*Even if your voice cracks,*  
*Speaker, infallible singer,*  
*In a century of immeasurable burning,*  
*Tell me something true.*

**CYRUS CASSELLS** is the author of *The Mud Actor*, a National Poetry Series selection in 1982. These poems appear in his new book, *Soul Make a Path Through Shouting*, to be published by Copper Canyon Press. Last year he received a Lannan Award in Poetry. He lives in Rome.

Jean Valentine

### TO N., DYING

Day by day you are being drawn,  
through the TV's violet needle's eye.

Luminous is the hope you have been content with.

The shaman breaks the wrist of his  
countryman to get him to talk.  
The film crew walks around at the edge.

A guru beams in his jazz musician's shades.

Luminous is the hope you have been content with.

—Graveyard traveller,  
*I am coming in.*

### PURGATORIO: FELLINI

He was shovelling sand  
at the edge of the water, his heavy black glasses  
glittered with rain:

"Don't you see how much like a woman I am?"  
Shovel, shovel.

His throat was wrapped in water,  
and the water flowered with milt.

Shoveller, are you eating the earth?  
Earth eating you?

Teach me  
what I have to have  
to live in this country.

And he, as calm as calm, though he was dead:  
"Oh,—milt, —and it's *all* of it milt."

JEAN VALENTINE's most recent book of poetry is  
*The River at Wolf* (Alice James Books, 1992).  
She is now living in Ireland.

Richard McCann

### GHOST LETTER

Tonight the Chinese lanterns along the dock could lead your ghost to water;  
the departing ones need light, for their sight has already dimmed.

As for me: I'm sitting by the old canal,  
writing this ghost letter, staring at the moon. Dear friend:

There is no one pitiable in this life. No "pitiful abundance."  
If you saw back into this world, you would see me by the hydrangeas

still trained to the chain-link fence, where you once took my photo.  
If you have the inclination to look back, that is; if the dead

are changeless; if the gravesite is something other than a way of having,  
in the end. When you were dying, the hospital chaplain stood in the doorway:

she said we should be tending to your immediate journey; she said  
we should take turns sleeping; she said the room was too cold for words.

And someone told her: *Quiet! Don't you know the dead go on hearing for hours?*  
What might I have said? I had made so many promises. According to one book

I'd consulted, the autumn fields were set afire after harvest, to warm the dying,  
as they rose.

RICHARD MCCANN's new collection of poems, *Ghost Letters*, won the 1994 Beatrice Hawley  
Award and will be published this fall by Alice James Books.

Michael Grizzi

**DANTE ENTERS TIBET**

Baal insatiables nab a muslim embalming tower  
 Chief Sphincter Davies relates as how  
 "The world's a *saver* place" need  
 chases a dragon held close up  
 Far be it for him to lose control  
 during a death march remarking  
 the morgue went really well. So  
 what of spontaneity what we need  
 to stay hydrated shot-putting  
 brass knockers?

Cupido  
 shoots vitamins trees a Pamplona bangs  
 endorphins into a beauty scar mentality sagebrush looks  
 Think ricochet not head fake schmoozing  
*a capriccio* fetch me another tree to swill  
 Suncatcher next to O-rings down 50 flights  
 of maple sponge sleeve-jacked to 30 degree  
 slope (catamount in cryopac) little bees in little trees  
 witnessing the wind's sea swallowed  
 through gallant portals blowing delicately  
 across the sunline of afternoon streetside

**MICHAEL GIZZI** is the author of six books of poetry,  
 including *Continental Harmony* (Roof Books, 1992).  
 He is editor of the magazine *Lingo*.

Martha Rhodes

**THE NUDE**

When I lay for three-hour stretches  
 on his torn, gold velvet pillows  
 refusing both coffee and toilet,  
 I was eighteen and did not consider other jobs.

The ritual of undressing, our ritual,  
 his back turned, and me unbuttoned,  
 unbraiding my hair, bent over  
 and shaking it loose, did not bring us closer.

He never watched, only whispered,  
 May we begin?  
 And my answer was the creak of his sofa.

Now I am here, in this gallery,  
 fifteen years younger and still looking  
 past him to his wife posed at the piano,  
 her photo on the table behind him, that photo

always with us, even on the day he startled me,  
 his hand on my ankle and he told me  
 our work together was finished.  
 It wasn't finished.

I knew nothing about her artist/husband.  
 But I could make up anything,  
 and even if it took me years,  
 I would write and tell her everything.

**MARTHA RHODES**'s first collection of  
 poetry, *At the Gate*, will be published  
 this fall by Provincetown Arts Press.  
 She is the founding editor of Four Way  
 Books and the director of the Civic  
 Center Synagogue Reading Series  
 in New York.

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## Commercial Street

by Dy Jordan

A short story excerpted from a novel in progress,  
*The Tarot of Madam Crow: Images from the Shadow  
of the Tower*.

*If you consider the soprano saxophone in solo...*

— WILLIAM RYAN

THE SAXOPHONE PLAYER is sad tonight. She's somewhere near and coming this way, blowing her guts out through the brass bell of the sax and trailing them down Commercial Street. She doesn't put out a hat or a jar or a guitar case or her shoes to collect money from tourists. She just wanders up and down the street blowing the thing like she *has* to. Like a fool. Blowing out her brains and her guts and her heart for free.

I shut Enya off the shop stereo. Enya sounds like a ghost. Enya's been sucked white. This woman with the sax makes you want to light a candle and drink Jack Daniels Black Label and cry for a while—which I can't do, of course,

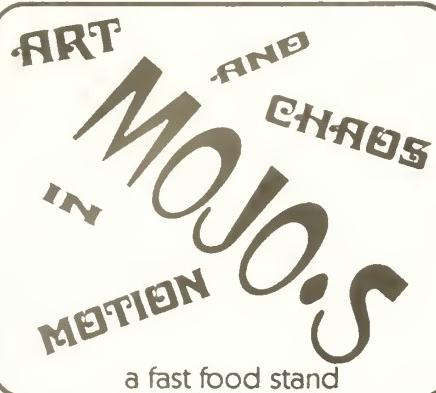
since I'm working, trapped here in this musty basement by my own art, here on Commercial Street where shopping is entertainment and the shops stay open till 11 p.m.

So this sax player sets the mood—the way the music played during the opening moments of a movie sets the mood—and it is a sad mood. Tonight I was sad anyway, so what difference does it make? That's why I turned off the shop music. Otherwise I'd put on... I don't know... I don't *have* any upbeat music... Dr. John, maybe... and turn it up loud and sing along so I wouldn't have to hear the splash of her guts on the pavement.

Four 18th-century stone steps down off the street, a tiny door looking out into the sea of upscale tourists. It's all I want. It's all I need. A tiny door and stone steps down. Any more would be too much. Suppose I had a shop with one of those big plate-glass display windows that costs \$40,000 just for the summer season.

What would I do with it? Sit like the palm reader down the street in a glass cage, like a monkey doing my trick, tourists gawking? Then I'd have a panoramic view of Commercial Street. I could see the tourists from Connecticut in their new pink and turquoise shorts outfits, the upwardly mobile with baby carriages that take up the whole sidewalk with steel-belted radial wheels and armored sides and triple-padded interior so that the precious cargo inside looks safe enough from the weirdness of Commercial Street—black drag queens, Chippendale boys in leather swim suits, street musicians, fortune tellers, Lesbian couples holding hands, the Portuguese fishermen who belong on Commercial Street but look scary and out of place with fish guts staining their pants.

Instead of the panoramic view, I see folks framed in my door. A snip of them. A moment. A turning of the head to smile at a lover, the lifting of a hand to wave to a friend, an angry

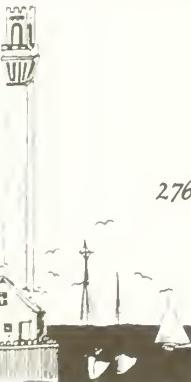


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scowl, a preoccupied stumbling along, a slice of pizza being lifted to the mouth, a flash of color. Unless they're sucked underground into my basement cave, that's all I'll ever see of them.

The Tibetans say it's hard to get a human life. They say a sea turtle surfacing from the bottom of the sea only once every 100 years has a better chance of accidentally poking its head through a ring the size of a lifesaver floating on a stormy sea than a soul has of getting a human incarnation.

Out there they stroll by casually. They buy lottery tickets across the street. They laugh. They look. They have a birth and a death and a mother and a father; they have dreams and fears and a favorite song and maybe a dog, and just for a moment they are framed with all of that in my door and then they are gone and someone else is there with a different birth and death and dream and dog. They are bright fish swimming by. Above my door, on the inside where it should say *Exit*, is a sign J.R. put there. It says *Entrance*.

I see what they are eating. A slice of pizza, an ice cream cone, fudge, saltwater taffy, or one of those sinister, ill-planned Dove Bars that drops its chocolate shell onto the street almost as soon as it's opened, so that in front of my shop, waiting to get tracked inside, are little turds of chocolate.

I see what they are wearing: not much this time of year. And their asses. I see asses all day. Buns of steel, buns of dough, buns of jello. Buns exposed. Buns baked brown. Buns disguised behind bellowing pants. It's all about the packaging of buns.

And heads. Asses and heads. The ass follows along behind, but the head must be carried. Tonight I've been surveying forward heads. It looks like about four out of six people walking by out there have a forward head. I can't always see the head—sometimes it is cut off by the top of my door—but I can tell by the angle of the body. Of course, this may not be the national average for forward heads. You have to consider that these folks are on vacation and are trying to pack a whole year's worth of relaxation into two weeks so they have to push it a bit. And then this is an unusual place where folks stick their necks out, and then there are folks watching other folks stick their necks out and their eyes are out on stems watching, so that pulls *their* necks out.

But still, there's only one sensible way to carry the head—which weighs about 20 pounds whether you're on vacation or not—and that is perfectly balanced on the spine. Traditional women of the Third World know this. The woman straps her baby to her back. She balances the head then balances the laundry on top of the head. She walks in elegance to the river. She doesn't get there sooner than she is supposed to, like with all the washers full, she

gets there exactly when the river is ready to take the clothes. On the way she will meet a friend. She won't have telephoned the friend. They'll just meet at the right moment because their head is balanced on the spine. They will chat as they pound the clothes on rocks and wait for the sun to bleach them. They won't rush back home, because how could they, walking under the head that way? The heart lines up with the head.

Think of the extra effort to carry 20 pounds unbalanced that way, out in front of the spine. Think of the stress on the neck and shoulders. Think of rushing to get nowhere too soon. Think of how the forward head leaves the shoulders vulnerable and the seventh cervical vertebra exposed. Grief could land there and push the head forward even more. Responsibility could sit too heavily. It's a perch for regret. Addiction. A monkey of some kind. And it gets harder—the burden of the head once it leaves its sacred point of balance on top of the spine—as one gets older. Old women grow a dowager's hump right there at the seventh cervical and old men begin to look like turkey buzzards, sticking out their necks too far, losing balance, reaching for the brass ring, slipping, falling, straining the lower back, growing around a twisted spine. Pretty soon they're looking down, not to the future at all. They've got a cane. The Ouroboros. The snake bites its tail. The curve of the earth where sea meets sky. The eyes turn in, then, back to the past.

People walking by can see me too, if they look. Sometimes they stare at me. Sometimes they look away. I may look too wild or too sad or they may be drawn magnetically to that wild sadness. Sometimes I stare at them, drawn to their optimism or their innocence or their stability or their clean white tennis shoes, and sometimes I look away. If they have on a shirt that says *Grandmother*, or *Ask me about my grandchildren*, I certainly look away. I'm offended by tee shirts that say stuff like that.

Anyway, I'm hardly odd, compared to the rest of the weirdness on Commercial Street. So I stand at the door, sometimes, looking at buns and heads, or looking for stable happy spirits. The others, I see inside. I look at them. They look at me. Sometimes we smile and make eye contact.

In the first glance at a person, before any walls go up, before any notions are set or attitudes copped, in that gap of time before we know we're looking, sometimes, then, everything can be seen. Later, if we get acquainted, we'll forget what we saw in that first moment. If my eyes look haunted, well, they've seen the Taj Mahal. They've cried tears into the ocean and into the Ouachita River. The river flooded. The ocean never left her tidal flat. Nothing changes the ocean but the moon. If I look sad to you, well, I am sadder than I look.

Out there, women are running with wolves.

They howl at the moon and drink till dawn and dance naked on the dunes. And there are lots more who want to be. Their husbands have tried so hard. It's the good man, the salt-of-the-earth man, whose wife will run with wolves and leave him sitting in a bar somewhere with a pasty face not understanding how he got there, trying to remember his Navy days, waiting for her to return, blaming himself while she's off looking for the Tarot reader. Those run-with-wolves wannabes look at me while I look at their husbands. Hey, if you want this wild spirit of woman, take it. I'm into running with dogs, myself.

I've even developed a line of doggie perfumes to cover the wild scent. It's called the Ummmm—Dog Line... inspired, of course, by Moondog. There is *Timber Moon*, a scent of cedar with a bass note of vetiver, especially good for grounding on full moons; *Bitch in Heat*, patchouli with a hint of rose for attracting Mr. Right; and *Spirit Dog*—dedicated to the memory of Lotus—which is sandalwood and clary sage for clearing. It's a good line, consciously blended in harmony with the stars using only the finest essential oils. I'll never make any money off it. Calvin Klein will make a bundle off of doggie perfumes, but it was my idea, to cover the smell of the wild.

I have a forward head too. Who knows when I started to carry my head out in front of my spine, going nowhere too soon? I was delivered by forceps, my mother says, yanked from the womb before I was ready. I didn't get to push my way out in timely fashion. Who cares? The doctor and my mother were probably tired of waiting. And I love the way the stars lined up at just the moment of my untimely birth—it put the Sun and Moon and Venus and the Part of Fortune all in the Twelfth House. House of Egypt, House of Bondage, House of Karma. Doing time in monasteries and caves. Secret enemies. Secret lovers. Serve or suffer. This has made my life interesting. I'm astrologically challenged. Ten more minutes, Mercury would have been there too. I would have sat in some musty old cave writing memories that no one would ever read, looking backward, trying to assimilate my karma and move on.

What I'm thinking is this: if stretching for the Future causes the head to thrust forward, then dwelling on the Past may bring it back into alignment—if I can catch it soon enough before it begins to drop down onto the chest making double chins in front and a permanent perch for sorrow on the seventh cervical vertebra. I figure after all this time of peering like a crow into the Future, rushing forward, going nowhere for no reason too fast, I'll sit quietly for a while and look backward into the Past and maybe somewhere there is a balance and the head will snap back into alignment with the throat and with the heart. I'm finding the Present unten-

able right now anyway.

There are two ways people pray: 1) Head bowed and, 2) eyes raised to the sky, head fallen back.

Folks can see into my cave, just enough, not too much. A mysterious glimpse as they go by. A cobwebby icon, a chalice, a Tarot deck, a Louisiana snapping turtle skull the size of a human skull, an ancient candelabra, a sword in the cement on the threshold, Moondog on the floor, me at my des!, crow feather in my hair to lift the head. Something may catch their eye. They may drop through the rabbit hole. Tonight I don't care, one way or the other, whether they do or don't.

But tonight they will come. They'll be sucked underground, not knowing why. They'll bring their ghosts in to mingle with mine and see some cards.

I light a candle and some incense and stand in the door looking at the sky, at how the stars are lining up. Tonight is one of those nights, for no particular reason that I know of, when the shades will gather. Maybe it's the moon approaching full and the night being sultry and the smell of death in the air. The moon opposing Venus, maybe, and Pluto in Scorpio and Mercury conjuncting the Sun and Mars conjuncting Jupiter squared to Neptune conjuncting Uranus—Sea and Heaven meeting for the first time in 171 years—and then retrograde, so maybe that's churning up some ghosts. From the bottom of the sea, maybe 171-year old ghosts, like the pirates and the whores who fought and fucked and slept on straw right here in this very basement when this was a whaling town and this was the Green Lantern. Semen and blood might have seeped through the straw into the basement floor. If it did, then it's still here, and maybe that would attract some ghosts on a night like this.

I could smudge them away with sage smoke, but why? Maybe they need to be here, just like everyone else. Maybe they're on vacation. There are the ghosts of run-away slaves who hid here when this house was a stop on the underground railroad. And Jackson Lambert's—a writer who left his ghosts here in this basement when he moved out after covering his typewriter with cement, cementing it to the floor and leaving only four keys exposed: F and U and C and K. And there is, I've been told, confidentially, a headless skeleton in a burlap bag buried nearby. It is one that was stolen from the cemetery when the counter-magician down the street let it be known that he would pay good money for a human skull. So there's that ghost, looking for his head. I hope he finds it in the head shop and takes it back to the grave along with all the other creepy junk in there. I can't imagine that a real authentic human skull would want to keep company with plastic day-glo ones dangling from the end of key chains or pewter skull paper-

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weights or skull tee-shirts or skull fake tattoos or skull roach clips or skull nose rings—as if it's the *nose* they're wearing them in. The UPS man says he delivers \$4,000 worth of junk a day there. Death is cool. It's in.

The woman saxophone player looks like the Pied Piper, there are so many ghosts behind her. The sax bumps against her hips as she passes my door, the brass bell swinging against flowered tights, above Doc Martins, the notes of St. James Infirmary flickering the candle flame and causing it to die... *saw my baby there... all laid out on a long white table.*

I stand for awhile looking out, looking up, looking back, coaxing the head onto the top of the spine, listening to the notes of the sax, watching the crowds on the sidewalk part as she passes... *so pale, so cold, so fair...*

Gibbous moon, arcing toward mid-heaven, opposing Venus. Opposing Venus. Does that mean they don't see eye to eye? Or does it mean they do—being on opposite sides of the universe that way, like two people not sitting side-by-side but looking across a table, one reflecting the light of the other?

As always, I gaze to the Tower, checking its position, noting its backlighting, the angle of the moon to it, whether anyone is leaping from it, head first, plunging like a fallen angel, crown gone. The Tower has not moved and no one is leaping from it. No one ever has, as far as I know. Two people have fallen from it by accident. Both while attempting to climb it—scaling the outside of it.

Officially it is the Monument. It has no use except as a tourist attraction. It can be seen for 20 miles by ships approaching. It makes the skyline distinctive. Tourists know they have arrived when they see it looming out of the dunes. What it is a monument to is tourists. The *first* tourists. Pilgrims. Built in 1910, it was modeled after one in Italy. It is built of huge grey stones, which must have been brought in somehow from somewhere, because here there is nothing but sand, just sand and sea. Grey and ominous and rising above the sea, it looks very much like the Tarot Tower, which is a cold unlivable structure—a prison from which one must eventually escape or be cast out. This one you can visit. You can climb it from the inside, no problem. You can go inside it anytime between the hours of 10 a.m. and six p.m. from Memorial Day till Columbus Day. You walk up a 100 or more stone steps until you reach the top and can look out across the bay on one side and the ocean on the other side.

*Where the women are strong and the men are pretty.* Someone outside my door reads the front of a tee shirt that hangs in the window of the shop above me. For six years now I've had a tee shirt shop above me. I don't know why. It isn't the same tee shirt shop. There have been three different ones. I would prefer to have any other

kind of shop above me. The sex shop that sold day-glo dildos was better. Or the video shop that kept *The Wizard of Oz* going on the TV in the window. But now it's tee shirts. For six years.

I remember when I first saw tee shirts that spoke. It was in New Orleans, Mardi Gras. My first husband bought me one. It was hot pink and it had a little chick hatching out of an egg. It said *I just been laid.* That was 25 years ago. Would you believe I saw that same tee shirt this summer in the window of a shop here? It was in the same window with the tee shirt that has a caterpillar mounting a ruffled french fry and the french fry saying, *Knock it off asshole, I'm a french fry.* I guess a good tee shirt never dies.

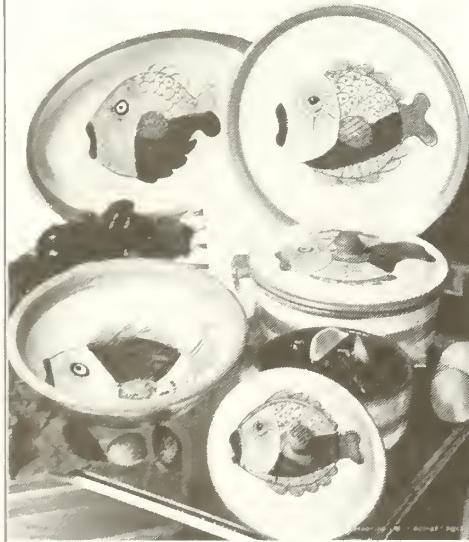
The tee shirts in the shop above me appeal to the gay and politically correct crowd. People can express themselves just by walking down the street. *Hate is not a family value*, they can say. You can come out of the closet. You can come all the way out by saying *Gay and Proud* in bright red, or you can come out humorously and tentatively by saying *I'm not gay but my boyfriend is.* Or you can get raunchy and say *You're a bad boy, go to my room.*

People can say what they want to say. If you don't like what they are saying you don't have to look. But why do folks have to stand in front of my porthole to the world reading them? Why does the same tee shirt have to be funny over and over again? Why can't they just read them silently and keep their comments to themselves? *Recovering Catholic.* How funny can that be in August? It wasn't all that funny in May.

Past the crowd gathered in front of my shop reading tee shirts, a very skinny man is running by in the street. He's too skinny. He should stop jogging. He looks like Death. Maybe he's running from Death. I don't know his story. Well, yes I do, but it's not important to tell it here. The important thing is that he looks like Death and every time I see him jog by, which is five or six times a day, I think of him as Death running down Commercial Street. Running, arms above his head, dark hair, pale face. Running through bikes and cars and waves of people—parents pushing baby carriages, butch women holding hands, men in skirts, men in high heels, men in wheel chairs, dogs on leashes, kids on leashes, punks on skateboards—they all move out of his way. He rules. He raises his arms, bony arms, above his head and sails through the crowd, never looking right or left, not speaking or nodding or smiling. And he's not wearing ear phones.

HERE COMES someone! Down the steps. She's sweet as can be. About 16. She reminds me of my daughter, Marasi. Tanned legs. White flats. White shorts. She's coming in to see Moondog. She spotted her from the street.

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"Is it a Dalmatian?"

"No. Not a Dalmatian."

Moondog does her groveling trash-dog act at the girl's feet. She bows with the underside of her throat pressed flat onto the basement floor, a paw on either side of her head, as low as low can get.

J.R. says, "You can take the trash out, and you can take the dog out, and you can take the dog out of the trash, but you can't take the trash out of the dog."

"What kind of a dog is it?"

"A white-trash dog."

"No way."

"Yeah. That's what she is. A white-trash dog."

I tell the Moondog story while the girl strokes her head.

"She kept getting in my trash down in Louisiana so I started feeding her to keep her from turning over my garbage can every day and scattering stuff all over the yard until she found what she wanted, which was maybe just a single chicken bone in the bottom of a bag or an empty tunafish can or a tampon. Anyway, one thing led to another and here she is now in a beach resort, eating dollar-a-can dog food, conning tourists out of pizza and ice cream. And she still can't pass up a trash can."

"Her head is like white velvet."

"Now it is. But when I first met her it was filled with sores and ticks. And it wasn't white, it was grey. She was covered with river mud and soot. Somewhere she learned to look for bones under the remains of old campfires. And she had the mange. And she was in heat so she ran with a pack of hungry male dogs behind her. She would come by every morning to check out my trash. It takes a lot of garbage to support a white-trash dog. I don't have much, so I had to start feeding her."

The girl is captured by Moondog now that she's heard her story. That's what reminds me of Marasi. The way a 16-year old girl can give her heart so suddenly and completely to something soft and vulnerable. A stuffed animal can capture them. They don't have boundaries on their hearts if a thing is soft and needy. It's dangerous, of course, but can you tell them?

"She's limping!"

"Yeah, she limps sometimes. Down in Louisiana, one morning at dawn I heard a shot. I woke up knowing she'd been shot by the redneck down the road who keeps exotic birds and shoots dogs. That's silly, I told myself. It was a dream. But I knew. Pretty soon I heard her whining outside my door and in the grey dawn I could see blood all over my porch. She was trembling and holding up her back leg. After the vet bill, I figured I'd keep her. She wouldn't walk on it until we got here and she started running in the sand. Now she only limps when she's trying to get attention. Shows what exercise will do for a bullet wound."

The girl doesn't really remind me of Marasi. For one thing, she's blond and her hair is short, not long and dark and luxurious and shimmering. And her eyes are bluish. Not golden. Her movements are tight and shy, not flowing and gracious. She's less confident than Marasi, and not as alive.

"Hey is this shit for sale?" A punk Latino kid has followed the girl into the shop. He's got his hair slicked back into that James Dean look and he's wearing an orange tee shirt that says, *Hasta la vista, baby*. Behind him are two friends, a girl and a guy.

"No this is a museum." J.R. passes them on his way out for coffee.

"I believe it, man. What do you guys do, tell fortunes or what? Hey lady, tell me my future." He's sticking his palm out. His friends are laughing. He's standing there bouncing a cocky bounce. Hand held out, palm up.

Of course he thought he was God. You could tell that by the way he bounced down the steps into the shop. I should say gallery just to make it clear that this is no joint, no five-dollar boardwalk fortune-telling joint. I charge plenty for my readings, and I don't do palms.

I should make it clear, too, that I'm selective. I won't read for just anybody. Just because I'm on Commercial Street doesn't mean I'm desperate. For instance, I won't read for doctors or lawyers or anybody with a black hole in their aura. Generally I won't read for Catholic priests. Heaven knows they keep popping in, trying to disguise themselves. As if they could. I read for one last year—against my better judgment. I saw his guilt the minute he walked in. It wore bright red and sat on his left shoulder. He thought he was queer. Well, shit, I said, get a life. He went away feeling great and left the guilt with me. It sat on my shoulder like a red-assed baboon for a full month. Almost got to be a pet. I had to dive naked into the ocean on a full moon (and this was in November) to get rid of it. So I won't do that again. I'm not desperate for money. In fact, I generally won't read for anyone with a lot of money. They get readings just for fun. They're bored with psychotherapy. They make you work twice as hard, squeeze an extra 20 minutes out of you after the reading is over, and they don't tip. I won't read for anyone real old. They want too much from the cards. They want their whole life back. And I certainly won't read for anyone with a tee-shirt that says *Grandma* (unless it's a man). I won't read for anyone real young, either. There's not much to read, they're not very interesting, and they know everything anyway. I prefer not to read for New Agers. They're easy enough—just tell them about their past lives and avoid the present one—but they want to make long, meaningful eye contact long after the meaningfulness has gone.

All of these people, I send to the Mystic Crystal Moon. They do palms for \$5. They sell

## ~Far Side of the Wind~



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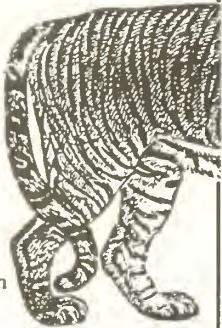


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mounted crystals from Taiwan and pewter wizards and glass crystal balls. I, of course, being a gallery, sell the better stuff. The real thing. Natural stones mounted in 14 kt gold. Oils and potions blended according to the phases of the moon and transits of the planets, old books of wisdom and metaphysical art. Of course, I don't sell to just anyone. These antique objects of art are increasing in value everyday. Sometimes you're better off not selling a thing. When you sell an old sacred thing, you want the person buying it to have the heart for it. Once you hear them say I'll *think* about it, you know they're not ever coming back.

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Anyway, I don't do palms, I don't do drunks, and I don't do punks. So I knew when he bounced in that I wasn't going to read him.

"I don't do palms."

"Come on, ol' lady. What kinda fortune teller are you? You mean you can't tell me my future? You a fake or what?" He cuts his eyes to his friends and shoves his palm at me.

I take his hand. "You are going to die."

Well that stops him dead in his tracks. He stands there like he's glued to the basement floor with his own bubblegum. He's still bouncing a little. Knees bent, like he was on a spring. A cocky bounce like that can't just stop on an uncool dime. It's got to ease off—full body shifting back and forth, a few twitches of the hand, and finally just the head bobbing up and down like, "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah." I've got him fixed now. Unblinking. His muddy brown eyes are darting to hell and back. But I am piercing. Relentless. I can see right through him, right to his soul which is just this side of nothing. I can see his mama and his mama's mama. Those poor women. Raised him up to crown their glory. Father, son, and holy ghost.

But what I see is just the 18-year by-product of a mediocre little Saturday night orgasm—a Clint Eastwood movie, pizza at Franco's, a couple of beers, full moon, '68 LeMans with a glow-in-the-dark Sacred Heart hanging from the mirror, empty lot behind a Safeway, pink cashmere sweater, C-cup bra, slipping onto the floor of the car, skirt lifted... Jose and Maria. Holy Jesus. It wasn't even the first time they'd done it. It was the 147th time they'd done it. A couple of groans, a grunt or two, and here he is. Eighteen years down the working-class road, bouncing in front of me like hot shit on a pogo stick.

His hand is as alive and energized as a puppy in the sun. Essential life force. Vibrant, virile, pulsing, radiating. Jesus. With God on your side,

you could take that energy and sack a whole country. And to tell the truth, it wasn't his death I saw when I looked at his hand. It was Jose and Maria behind the Safeway.

So. He's standing there, trying to stop the bouncing without looking, to his friends, uncool. Trying to swallow without gulping, muddy eyes darting to hell and back, trying to unglue his feet from the floor and his eyes from mine. He's running one hand down the side of his jeans to wipe off the sweat and trying to yank his other hand out of mine.

He'd love to laugh at me now. Silly old woman with a crow feather in her hair. He'd love to laugh, but he can't. My eyes are too piercing, seeing all the way to the door of his soul, which is nothing but a Saturday night hump in a Safeway parking lot. And he can't get back his hand. He tugs and I tighten. I feel happy. Like an old crow with her claws on something shiny. He's pinned. Standing there in his bright orange muscle shirt with *Hasta la vista baby* on it. I can see his heart pounding in his temples and there's sweat on his arms now. Sculpted muscles. Lean, tanned, youthful arms. His Adam's apple bobs as he gulps, not able to hide it. Not from me. His mouth is dry, too.

His friends abandon him saying, "I'm outta here, man. This place is too fuckin' weird." Now I think that's weird. You got a friend in trouble, stuck to the floor, pinned to nothing, soul leaking out his eyes, palms sweating, grim reaper barreling down on him like Hell on a Harley, some old crow woman pecking out his guts and you abandon him? Walk out? Just like that? *Hasta la vista, baby*.

They break into giggles when they reach the safety of Commercial Street. I can hear them as they blend back into the crowd.

"Jeeze, did you see all those animal skulls?"

"And there were cobwebs all over everything."

"Weird, man. Hey Jason, Come on!"

He wants to. Lord knows he wants to. Jas, baby, whatta you gonna do? He cuts his eyes toward his friends. Every cell, every atom, every molecule is wishing for that spot at the top of the stone steps. To be past the stone sphinx at the entrance. To be—Oh Jesus—to be outside where it's normal. To have never come in. To never have asked the question. To be anywhere but here in this musty ol' witch's den watching his invincible friends step into the crowd. I'm not ready to unpin him though. He asked and that's that. Poor baby. Poor precious.

I think I may be smiling a little now. Slight upcurling of the outer edges of the mouth. Still holding his hand, palm up. Still piercing him with my eyes. Now he knows and he can never again not know.

"I'm going to die?" He can barely get out the words. He's croaking like a frog. He's not bouncing at all now. In fact, all the spring has gone

out of him. In fact, he looks a little like a frog now. All the hard muscles have relaxed, his head has dropped into his shoulders. He's flaccid and pale. Blinking. Helpless. A child could capture him now. A snake could swallow him whole. A bird could pierce him with sharp talons. I nod and keep nodding. Slowly.

I'll have to unpin him soon. Bad karma to hold him too long or to enjoy too much his loss of invincibility. Drat. But he *will* leave it here. I'll hold it like a trophy. A shiny thing. I'll put it in a black glass box. He may come to visit it—if he remembers where he left it—but he will never get it back.

"When am I gonna die?" So scared. So. I'll have to let him go. What a world. What a world.

"I don't know..." I release his eyes first then his hand. I turn away from him and pick up my ostrich plume feather duster. It's very elegant. Turn of the century or earlier. Tortoise shell handle. First time I held it, I saw an Austrian Countessa. "...someday."

•

HIGH TIDE HAS left a dead seagull on the beach across the street. Moondog and I saw it before it died. It looked sick then. Moondog barked at it and started to chase it and when it didn't fly she fell to her belly and grovelled. She barked some more and finally left it in peace. It's starting to smell now. It will take a higher tide to remove it. A moon tide. A dark moon or a full moon. Everyone is too busy to remove it. We wait for the moon tide.

Moondog will remove it if I let her. She wants to roll in it. I see her nose quivering with the smell of it. She wants to wait until I'm busy with a customer then dart out the door, run through the crowds on Commercial Street to the beach and roll in it. The smell of it won't come out even when she's bathed—sudzed down with Ivory dishwashing liquid. Under the cedar oil I put on her will be a deep bass note of dead seagull. If she gets on my bed to awaken me at dawn, it will be the first thing I smell.

*Leave me alone, I'm cruising someone else.* A new tee shirt. People are cracking up in front of my door. I wish they'd take their fat asses on down the street. One ass—just one—is eclipsing my entire view.

On August 10 they had the first "Men in Skirts Day." Since then I've seen a lot of men, gay and straight, in skirts. *Take back the skirt*, they are saying. I think it's about time. Men in the Tarot wear skirts. And fancy hats too.

If I were a man I'd definitely burn my jock strap and wear a skirt. Some of them are stunning. Those sarongs wrapped around the buns of steel are my favorite. No shirt. Muscular, tanned bodies with maybe some talisman around the neck. A pierced nipple sets the look off, but that makes my breasts suck into my

ribs. I wouldn't go that far.

I think those plaid kilts look silly. No length really works. The ones above the knee look stupid with those big hairy legs coming down into shoes that never work—oxfords, tennis shoes, sandals—nothing works. The longer kilts look traditional, Scottish, like a costume. If I were a man wearing a skirt I'd go wild rather than traditional. I'd wear something slit up the side. Black and slinky. Something that could be worn with sandals. I'd wear no shirt but a vest, a bright Indonesian vest of soft material. Or I'd wear something short with soft leather boots. I think men are lucky to have such shocking frontiers of fashion. Women have nothing left. We let our tits hang out and burned our bras and now we've put them on again. Who cares any more? It's not worth it, having your tits flopping around and sagging just to make a political statement.

"Is that a pit bull?" Someone yells from the street, bending over, peeping in.

"No, not a pit bull."

"What's its name?"

"Moondog."

"Does it play rock and roll?" Gawraff. Heeeeee.

"No. No musical instrument at all. She's untalented that way."

J.R. comes back with coffee and says the place feels like a tomb and why do I keep turning off the music. He puts Enya on again. He thinks people will buy his jewelry if Enya is playing.

"Just because they go into some kind of shopper's trance in front of the jewelry case and sway back and forth and stare at the moonstone ring like they've been captured by it, doesn't mean they are going to buy it," I tell him. "They're just listening to the song. They're gonna buy something made in Taiwan."

Tonight one of the clubs is waving the cover charge for any man wearing a skirt. The street is crowded now and full of men in skirts. Pushing through them, on their way to or from work, are a few locals—the year-rounders, the washashores, folks who come here for a summer and for one reason or another don't, or can't, leave, even when the season ends and the Nor'easters blow arctic air down out of Canada and all the shops and restaurants close up and Commercial Street is dead and white with snow. Artists and writers, some of them, who use the long cold winters creatively. For a while they do, then they get drunk till Memorial Day. Some of them are famous, but you wouldn't know it, seeing them walk by out there on their way to work at a shop or a bar or a restaurant. They look frumpish in something from the Thrift Store.

An old year-round crone from down the street is eyeing a hard male butt in a tight black-knit mini. "Don't we love it," I yell out to her. "Men in skirts."

"Shake it but don't break it, honey," she says to the hard male butt.



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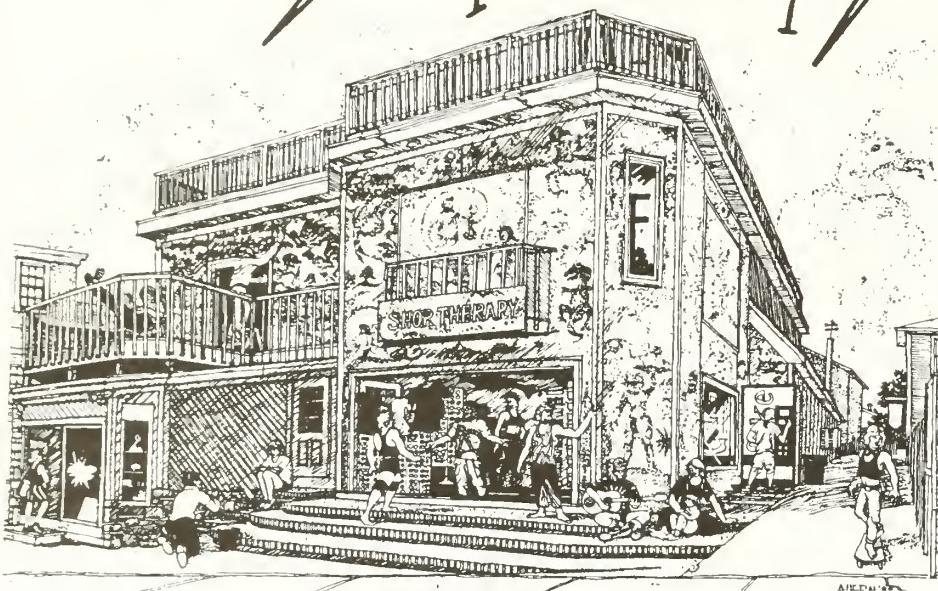
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A tee shirt says, *This ain't Kansas*. People do change from black and white to technicolor when they get here. That's why there are so many clothing shops and one great thrift shop. People throw away the clothes they come here with. You can come here as a stockbroker and leave as a filmmaker. You can come here straight and go home gay. You can come here married and go home single. You can come here and not go home. You can change from a woman to a man, from a man to a woman, from a child to a fairy, or an angel, or a ghost. You can change from a mother to a witch.

People come and go here, they shapeshift, like the sky and the sea and the lighting of the sea and sky. They change their image or their faces or their mood or their gender. Or you think they've died, and then you see them. Like Bette Davis, post stroke. Or you *know* they've died and then you see them. The way Marilyn Monroe plays in clubs here. The way Marasi keeps skipping into the shop and laughing. The way we all saw Arne Manos at his memorial service after he disappeared—like an alchemist—during Hurricane Bob the year the lilacs bloomed in September.

Once I saw Dorothy here. She was looking for Toto. That was back in 1991 when Hurricane Bob was approaching. Can you believe they even made a tee shirt out of that: *I was blown by Bob*. But that was after, when it was funny. This was before when all the shopkeepers were in a panic and the tee shirt shop had its windows taped and all the tourists had gone home—except for the one woman who was taking pictures of me while I was hauling pathetic, makeshift sandbags to put in front of my door. I thought she could show the pictures years from now and say, this was Madam Crow before she drowned down in her shop during Hurricane Bob. I was thinking that if she put down her camera and helped me haul sand bags then she wouldn't have any pictures to show and maybe no story to tell. I was thinking other wicked thoughts about her, when Alexi Romonoff appeared beside me and started helping me haul sandbags. Of course the sandbags wouldn't keep the ocean from rushing down the four 18th-century stone steps.

This is, after all, just a little slip of land out in the ocean. Commercial Street is less than 50 yards from the bay at high tide. There's no sea wall, nothing. Just us and the deep blue sea. We're like the Queen of Cups out here. One foot in the water, our seats on the sand. Vulnerable. It's where dreams come true and hearts get broken open and spilled out onto the dunes. It's a Scorpio town, they say. The spit of sand like the curled tail of the scorpion. Or the center point of a great sandy ocean spiral. A watery, psychic, creative place. The lighting is special. No artist or writer can really capture it, though many famous ones have come here to

try. Sometimes the bay is a metallic blue while everything around it has grown dark, like it's lit from underneath with big underwater klieg lights. Sometimes the light falls across Commercial Street with the deep melancholy of New England fall, approaching dusk, and it will be June in the morning with The Tower gloomy against dark clouds, and the church clock chiming, 10 chimes, with the shopkeepers washing windows, getting ready for the onslaught of tourists, cash drawers open.

The sandbags were just plastic garbage bags filled with sand, hauled from the bay to stack on the bottom step against the door. Alexi must have known they wouldn't keep out the ocean, but he didn't say a word. Just filled and stacked. I told him gris-gris would probably work better than the sandbags and he said, well, you've got to do all you can. I couldn't figure out why he was helping me. I didn't know him very well then, but I knew he lived in the woods beside the dunes. He had gone wild, sort of. I knew that. It didn't take a psychic. I knew he thought his life work was hanging bells in trees in places where the tree spirits were depressed. He bought a brass bell from me once. He listened to them all until he found the one that had the nicest sound. The one he thought the trees would like.

Alexi isn't here this summer. No one knows where he has gone. When I walk on the dunes I can still hear his bells in the trees in places where I know the tree spirits are no longer depressed.

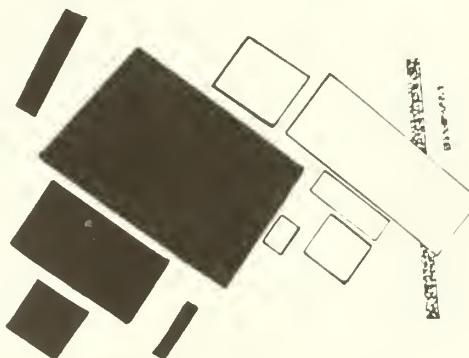
Last year he gave me the sacred dance of Isadora Duncan. He had gotten it in direct lineage from Marie Therese, one of the Isadorables. When he told me that, I asked him to teach me. I told him I would trade him for Tarot readings. He was willing, he said, to initiate me into the dance but warned me that the dance was tragic. I knew that. He described to me, as his teacher, Marie Therese, had described to him how Isadora didn't dance for a long time after her children had been killed and how when she did dance again it was in Carnegie Hall and she hardly moved at all. He stood and demonstrated, head bowed—a movement initiating from the toes, from the core of the earth, and ending in a slow dirge-like lifting of the arm and then the head, lifting like a Narcissus from the snow, a smooth, slow, resistant resurrection from the greatest pain, lifting until the pale, vulnerable heart is exposed to the sun, brave heart, to open again to the sun that way. For no more movement than that, she got a standing ovation.

I knew when I saw Alexi do it that I couldn't learn it from him, as he hadn't learned it from Marie Therese, who hadn't learned it from Isadora. No film of her dance exists.

"Initiate me," I said. "I know that dance."

But this was before that, and I hardly knew Alexi and didn't know he knew the Sacred

## ELEMENTS



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Dance of Isadora Duncan, and together we were doing the dance of the plastic sandbags in the face of Hurricane Bob, and it was all being captured on film by the woman tourist snapping away.

I told Alexi he could stay in the shop but he said no, he'd be okay, probably thinking that an illegal lean-to beneath happy trees in the dunes was safer than a dark, dark hole beneath Commercial Street no more than 50 yards from a very excited ocean, sand bags or no sand bags. I gave him a blue candle labeled "Peace in the Home," for when the lights went out, as surely they would. The sky was already growing dark and green. It was just after Alexi went walking off into the weird green light of Commercial Street carrying the blue candle labeled "Peace in the Home," that I saw Dorothy. It was one of those fancy beeswax candles that they scent and label and charge for three times over. I figured in this case it was probably worth it, though.

Dorothy came from the other direction. Like exit stage right, enter stage left. It was the *real* Dorothy too. Not some queen in drag. Braids flying in the wind, barefoot, in a blue gingham dress, basket on her arm. Frantic. Yelling, "Toto! Toto! Where are you?"

So. It ain't Kansas. But it ain't Oz either. I know that. There's no yellow brick road that ends in Emerald City. There's just Commercial

Street that ends at the breakwater on one end and the Holiday Inn on the other. There are only two gnomes here—the couple who push a shopping cart collecting cans and bottles. There are no all-good or all-bad witches—just the ones who meet on the dunes and dance naked and drum when the moon is full. And you can't click your ruby shoes and go home. Either you become a wash-ashore yourself or you have to leave on a bus or a plane or in a boat or drive a car or a bike down the one crowded highway or migrate south with your wares, the way the shopkeepers do, or die here and go home that way, West, out over the ocean. ■

**DY JORDAN** co-authored with Peter Stander the weekly column, *Travels with Madam Zingara*, which appeared in *Provincetown Magazine* during 1983-84. In the beginning the column was purely fiction, but the edges began to blur when they opened the Tarot Gallery on Commercial Street and began doing Tarot readings as Zero and Zingara—the characters from the column. Now she calls her work bio-fiction and draws blatantly from her experiences—the dark shadow of her 16-year-old daughter's murder in Louisiana in 1988 and from the thousands of Tarot readings she has done in Provincetown since 1984.

## FAX/ART/BOOK

Berta Walker invited me to show my work in her gallery. One of my projects will be assembling a book with pages faxed to me from people around the world. I want to show how all of us are closer together, how the world is getting smaller and more accessible simply by using new technologies like faxes, computers, modems and how artist use those tools. Today it really doesn't matter where I live. Working in Provincetown I can freely communicate with people from around the world. I have wings, I can fly.

FAX/ART/BOOK is about freedom. There no rules, no restrictions. The condition is one, and on my part: all of them are going to be included in the book, no matter what. You don't have to be visual artist. You may be a poet. Or a philosopher. Or a carpenter. I am not interested in your profession. What I am after is your vision of your world and yourself.

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by John Yau

TONIGHT STARTED OUT like a bird circling regally above the city. A crisp blue sky was glowing behind Lower Manhattan's rust colored towers, the narrow streets of Soho turning blue and gold in the autumn light and lengthening shadows. Clocks, cabs, and couples young and old held hands—everything and everyone seemed as if they were obeying the majestic pace of the gliding, soaring bird. It was the kind of postcard one wants to stay inside forever.

I walked over to the Red Star because Sheila said she would meet me there around nine. It wasn't too crowded when I got there. George was tending bar and talking to the regulars about baseball and football, the end of one season and the beginning of another, giving them whatever made them happy.

"Hi George, give me the usual."

"Vodka and soda, twist of lime coming up, sir," he replied.

That's what George always calls me, "sir." I have no idea why though I now suspect that, like Sheila, George sees right through me.

As I stood, waiting, I nodded my greeting to the row of familiar, weathered faces. A minute or two later, George slid my drink across the bar, picked up the money I placed there and left me standing alone, drink in my hand. The world was moving the way I wanted it to, smoothly and always forward, like a clock. Soon I would become the person I never thought possible.

I sat at one of the tables and watched the regulars leaning onto the bar, hunched down on their stools like aging race car drivers waiting for the checkered flag to fall. Soon I would leave this club of lonely men behind.

Leo was just across from me, holding down his spot at the far end of the bar, still doing the crossword puzzle, and sucking down his vodka and grapefruit juice.

"Got to get my daily dose of vitamin C," he tells me whenever we sit near each other. "Yep, these little greyhounds keep the messengers of old age away," he laughs, pointing to a glass which George always keeps full.

Leo's one of those people who always manages to look both disheveled and fit. He's in his late '40s and has sandy blond hair which could pass as a yacht owner's toupee. He says its his own hair but I don't believe him. I think it came from a cocker spaniel and that he had it grafted on by some unlicensed doctor.

Leo's one of the three or four people you can count on finding in the Red Star in the late afternoon. He always comes in wearing a suit and he always makes a ceremony of taking off his tie right before he sits on the last stool at the far end of the bar. No one knows if he has a job or

## Clothes Make the Man

BILL JENSEN, "Lust"  
etching

Courtesy Universal Art Editions Limited

not, or even what job it could be, since he seems to spend most of his time in here, drinking and doing the crossword puzzle. But he always pays for his drinks in cash, tips well, and never complains about being broke.

Wally was sitting next to Leo, talking to a woman I never saw before. Every chance he could he leaned over and whispered in her ear, and, as he did so, slid his hand across her back or rubbed her thigh. Happy hunting, Mr. Masseuse, I thought to myself.

Like Leo, Wally is in his '40s and has a crop of salt-and-pepper hair and a grim smile. He's neither fit nor fat, but somewhere in between. A good looking man on the brink of going to seed, women seem to fall in love with him, if only for the length of two or three drinks. It's his friendly hands that scare them away.

All of us like to sit as far away from the front door as possible. We like being in the back, where we can see everyone else in the place. I wouldn't say we do this in memory of Wild Bill Hickock or anything, that's too sophisticated.

You know those miniature green shrubs that grow in terrariums, the artificial light on day and night? That's us. Little green shrubs clinging to wet rocks and soft moist dirt. Or, if we've evolved beyond plants, then we're fish, our mouths opening and closing as we swing back and forth in the tide, hovering in the shadows near slimy rocks. And if we seem to be calling out, we aren't.

•

THE RED STAR and the Aerodrome may only be a few blocks apart, but, as someone I know once said of a synagogue near St. Peter's in Rome, it took almost 2000 years for the Pope to walk from one to another. Unlike the Red Star, with its cast of would-be actors, there are no regulars over 40 in the Aerodrome, which is a couple of blocks south of Canal Street and the



two topless bars I used to go to late at night, before going to the bars with no neon lights and no name above the door. Windowless places with loud music and beefy bouncers who frisked you for weapons. Bars where nearly everyone comes in a costume: Batman, Mr. Daredevil, Little Lucy, and the Merry Widow all go there. Six months ago, just before turning 30, I stopped going to these places and cut back on my drinking. I decided I had to change my ways, though I couldn't figure out exactly what this meant. It's not like I wanted to become a model citizen or anything. It's just that I wanted to get out of a rut that I felt I was digging deeper and deeper. I wanted to get out while I still could move over a few dozen feet or so, start another.

The night I met Sheila at the Aerodrome I was getting another drink when I saw an acquaintance, Betsy, sitting at a table. We had met at a party full of writers and artists and somehow, amidst the cheerless camaraderie, we started talking to each other. In the months since then we always said hello, as if to reassure ourselves that we once had a meaningful conversation.

Betsy and Sheila were disagreeing with each other about something when I walked over to their table. It wasn't private, but esthetic, so they didn't mind stopping where they were and inviting me to sit down. I went back to the bar, got my drink, and joined them.



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## BENETTON FACTORY OUTLET

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OPEN YEAR ROUND

Betsy was trying to finish her first novel. "I'm an only child and it's about four sisters," she told me at the party. When I sat down and asked her how she was doing, she brought me up to date. "One of the sisters has died since I last saw you, but the others are moving right along. Who knows? Maybe they'll all be there in the end. If the book ever gets published, I'm having a party for them and me."

Sheila told me she was talking to a new, young dealer about showing her photographs. "Conceptually speaking, they're about the occult presence of radiation in the deepest corners of our lives, the ones where even the dust can't reach."

I didn't try to press Sheila for more information because it would've meant that I didn't really understand what she was talking about, something you didn't admit to in the downtown scene. I just sat there, trying to act both curious and interested. Or maybe inspired and understanding. I knew some combination was the right one. I hoped it was the one I could summon forth, the one I had handy.

"They were," they announced simultaneously, "planning their seasonal assault."

I didn't say what I was doing because I wasn't sure that I was doing anything. My answer to any inquiry about what I'm doing has always been pretty much the same: "Oh, the usual. A little of this and a little of that."

My friends and I don't want to admit it, but there are two problems we have to face. We may be artists or writers, but we still believe in upward mobility. Only some of us think that making it in this town is a sign of corruption, while not making it is an act of integrity and heroism. But the ones who keep saying that the geography of Lower Manhattan is made up of two poles, corruption's filthy lucre or heroism's impoverished purity, are really just jealous. They want to live someone else's life. They want to trade their honesty card in and they're pissed off that no one is making them an offer.

The other problem is a bigger one. Being an artist or writer means you may one day get your work reviewed in the newspaper. You may even be mentioned in the gossip columns, but the fact is, you're still a small fish in a very big sea. You might say that artists and writers live in a pond; and some of them get to jump into a nearby lake. A few, a very few, make it all the way to the ocean. But that's another geography lesson and I'm not sure that I believe it. I'm not sure what I believe in, except that maybe some people believe in me. But their belief, its mirror, is what I haven't been able to face. That's what Sheila knew about me that first night.

SOMETIME LATER, SHEILA and I started meeting at the Aerodrome, Red Star, and other downtown bars. It was always just for a couple of drinks, and a long, slow descent that never quite touched bottom. We were flirting with the bottom, as well as each other. A quiet flirtation, almost as if two other people were saying these things, leaning towards each other without quite pressing their bodies together. Our flirtation filled the air between us with the perfume of what could be, but wasn't. At least not yet.

On the surface, our conversations were about books, movies, exhibitions, and gossip. Who did what when. What was said. Who did he become when he wasn't him? That kind of thing. Both of us knew that art and literature can be used to say lots of things, and it was those things that kept lingering, unsaid, that compelled me to call her once and sometimes twice a week.

What did I want to say or hear? If I close my eyes and think about it, I realize our flirtation, our talking around each other's lives, was a form of intimacy I found satisfying. The problem was that it couldn't stay that way. Eventually or maybe inevitably our flirtation started swirling around us, like a storm. And, like a storm, it became something larger than either of us. But in the beginning, in the first few weeks Sheila and I hung out, everything seemed fine. We were in a story that ended where it began, the kind of story I felt comfortable putting back on the shelf.

At the end of the night, Sheila would hail a cab and head back down to her place in the financial district. I would walk north to my apartment, sometimes stopping at another bar, sitting in a quiet corner, and drinking a beer. I wanted just enough alcohol to keep me high, maybe even raise me a little higher, but not enough to push me off whatever pinnacle I had reached. True, it was a pathetic pinnacle, but it was the only one I was sure I could manage.

No. Maybe it happened differently. A couple of days or hours ago, I would have told you that I kept feeling as if Sheila was pulling me toward her, that she was the North Pole and I was a piece of shiny metal. Tonight I don't know what's pulling me toward her, only that I'm being pulled.

ONE MORNING, A COUPLE OF months ago, I kept hearing children giggling, which made me think I was hallucinating since there was no one in the room with me and no children in the other apartments on this floor. Then, I heard one of them say: "Look, there's a naked guy over there."

I walked to the window and looked out. I live on the sixth floor so I'm hanging out the window when I realize that I was the naked guy the kid was talking about. There they were,

a bunch of kids standing by the window in the parochial school across the street from my apartment, a couple of nuns too. All of them looking at the strange man with no clothes on.

Had I forgotten about the school? Or had I never thought about the fact that there was a school across the street? Was this the first time they saw me? Or had they seen me before, stumbling about my apartment, lost in a fog? I must have only thought about them when I heard them, when they were a nuisance. Otherwise, they were invisible. And I suppose I believed I was invisible as well.

•

WHEN SHEILA WALKED through the doors of the Red Star, she was wearing a dress so thin everyone could see the fullness of her breasts and long muscular legs. She was like a dancer floating inside a curtain, someone you would want to photograph from every angle so that when nobody was looking you could hold it, fondle it, maybe even lick the dust off. That's where I thought the evening was going.

We began drinking and looking at each other. She stretched out her long legs so they were on either side of me. We sat at a small square table, my knees pushing against the edge of her chair. She slid down, squeezed my legs between hers, and then sat back up again, and smiled.

"I've been thinking that we should try a little experiment tonight," Sheila began.

"An experiment?" I repeated, puzzled and intrigued. I could feel the ants marching through my nerves.

"Yes, an experiment. The kind that will change our lives forever. Are you interested?"

"Sure," I answered, thinking that Sheila always did talk like this. I looked at her and then at my drink. I wasn't sure what else to say, and Sheila knew it. She smiled, two rows of perfect teeth. The kind you see in a toothpaste commercial.

I felt as if I was floating on some strange river, drifting through a landscape I had never seen before. The air was full of the sound of birds. Or was it the other people in the bar, all of them paying attention to something else, things that did not concern us. I smiled, but it felt forced. This was not how I expected the evening to go. Did I know how it would go?

The whole time Sheila didn't say anything. She just smiled and then picked up her drink, fiddled briefly with the straw, and drank.

We didn't go to Sheila's place or mine. We walked around for a while, arm in arm, like a happily married couple. Then we stopped and kissed in an alley. I remember my hands sliding down her back, and feeling the thin fabric clinging to her shoulder blades, her skin. Soft blonde down just above her upper lip.

SOMEWHERE IN NEW YORK, Hong Kong, or Berlin a movie was filmed on a dark street. A man and a woman are caressing each other in the shadows, which have been carefully accentuated by the floodlights the director has placed in key spots. The shadows have as much weight as the things they touch. Fragments of the couple's intimacy flash by on the screen. Weight of breasts against cloth, against skin. Bright beads of sweat rolling to the edge of a leaf or lip. Hands slipping beneath and between, opening and closing. Rustle of clothes. Tongues and teeth. Knees and legs. All through this encoun-

ter there is no music to distract the viewer, only the barely heard sounds of the couple's breathing.

The film dissolves.

When the film starts again, the couple is standing by the curb, under a street lamp, and she is on her toes, whispering in his ear. "I know you want to come home with me." Her words are wet and round. "I want you too. I want you to climb into my bed wearing a nightgown and lingerie. I want you to have on lipstick, powder and eyeliner. Once you do all of that, I'll be all yours."

Sheila's painting a picture and I'm watching her fill in the colors, shapes, and forms. There

are jagged lines and soft ones. There are promises and hints. A very large room at the end of a long hall, she tells me. An elevator that rises quietly to the ninth floor.

Before she can finish, a cab pulls up, and she turns and walks toward it, opens the door and gets in.

I'm standing in the street, looking at her. She smiles and throws me a kiss. The cab screeches off.

I DIDN'T STOP IN ANY bars because there was no one I wanted to see or talk to. I just walked home, climbed the stairs to my apartment, opened the door and walked into the dark kitchen.

Now I'm lying on the floor listening to the hum of the refrigerator. I'm holding a can of beer, as if it's a cold, wet stone, and I don't know whether I should put it down or throw it through the window. I haven't bothered to take off my clothes because that would mean the day is over and it's not.

It's really simple. I've never made anyone happy. I've never even turned out the way anyone hoped I would. I'm neither a success nor a failure. I'm something without a name.

Yes, it's true. I'm going to change my membership. From now on, I'll be exactly what you want. I'll wear a pale pink slip and a double loop of milky white pearls. I'll wear anything you got in your closet or bureau. Why, Sheila honey, I'm ready to be your one and only little darling. ■

JOHN YAU is the author of a dozen books of poetry, including *Edificio Sayonara*, art criticism, including *In the Realm of Appearances: the Art of Andy Warhol*, and a collection of stories, *Hawaiian Cowboys*, forthcoming this winter from Black Sparrow Press.



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# You'll Never Clean in This Town Again

by Louise Rafkin

IN 1972 I WAS HOME-EC student of the year. I made an A-line skirt and demonstrated knowledge of correct dish-washing order. I baked chocolate cookies and had to produce the exact yield written on the recipe. I ate a ton of dough but made the cookies the size of peanuts. I got an A in cookies. I tried not to upset our teacher—Mrs. Mathisson, a pinched finch-like creature who had heart trouble and—it was rumored—would die if she got angry. I learned how to polish silver and properly scour a sink. I wore my A-line skirt to receive my award and threw it out as soon as I got home.

I am a housecleaner. People like to talk to their housecleaners. With one man I discuss pornography and the new feminism while dusting. He loves Camille Paglia. He trails me with her book, quoting resentful "I-wish-I-could-get-laid" anti-lesbian dogma. I try to trip him with the vacuum cord. These discussions smell of Pledge but they are intelligent and wide-ranging. So why am I surprised to find my name on his phone list with the word "maid" typed beside?

I only clean houses. I decline dogs and kids. Dirty fag houses are cleaner than clean dyke houses. I hate hair. Especially pubic hair. Who doesn't? People who don't have to clean it up.

Why doesn't there exist a mop which does something more than push dirt from one place to another? A man on the moon and no useful cleaning implements. I don't do windows. I never pick up cat puke. I pretend it threw up after I left. Why is there no space for the vacuum between the toilet and the wall? Because men like women on their knees.

I have a bag of house keys. I have keys to million-dollar homes and cheap, chintzy condos. I had sex once in one of the chintzy condos. Next to the bed was a framed Hallmark card. "Certain people are a joy to know," it read. I turned it towards the wall. I came, leaving a crescent of wetness on the pink polyester bedspread. Why didn't we have sex in the million-dollar home? Because we had dinner there. Sushi and sunset and Steuben glassware. At one house I am washing the stairs and the woman walks naked up and down, up and down, right over my head. Passing me later in the narrow hall, she presses her body face first towards the wall. I squeeze by.

She pushed back into me. Later she tips me 10 bucks.

Once I was fired. The apartment was plastered with photos of naked men. One showed a close-up of a penis as long as my arm. I dusted it every week. There was a ship stand in the bedroom and hardware on the walls and a stack of *Meatman* magazines on the back of the toilet. One very hot, humid day, I was alone in the house. Hoovering with my earphones blasting, I took off my shirt. I still was hot. I took off my bra. The next week I was told that I had offended a male visitor who had poked his head

in during my short tenure as a topless maid. Fired from the penis house. I liked this job. These boys were so anal they alphabetized their household cleaners: All, Bold, Cheer, Dash, Fab. Besides, I know that topless cleaners, now big business in the city, charge \$57 an hour which is even more than I do.

Four of my clients were reading Kitty Kelly's Nancy Reagan book at the same time. Sometimes I dream about wearing Armani suits to work. I clean my own house when I have feelings that I can't stand.

Five people I have cleaned for are now dead.

BREON NINA DUNIGAN  
"Burning Memory House," 1991  
wood, plaster, fabric, 29H x 29W x 9D  
Photo: Peter Muscato



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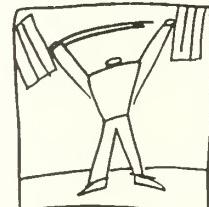
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One day I sat on the bed with a dying woman. Full of chemicals, she was bald and wouldn't let me see her head. She wore a huge floppy, battered, straw hat. Her round, hairless face reminded me of a cabbage-patch doll. I had just been dumped by a girl. "Honey," she told me, "life is too short. Find some love." We both cried, the vacuum whirring in place, the smell of sickness and 409 mixing to create in me a slight nausea. I wanted to hug her but didn't. She died the next week.

Who cleans up after a suicide? I don't really know cleaning, I admit, considering this question. That's cleaning. The husband of one of my clients shot himself. Someone called me. I played the message over several times. Helen needs some help cleaning, it said. Please call immediately.

I never called. I found out who cleaned, however, and that flesh is nearly impossible to get off white walls.

There are those who are dead and those that don't know they are dying. I know prescriptions. I know insurance forms. I know the signs of letting go. Still, it's nice to have a clean house to come home to. Or to leave from.

One guy was an agent summering in a million-dollar home with his four-foot poodle who often joined him in his lukewarm hot tub. I took names from his Roll-a-dex. I called Joni Mitchell at her Malibu home and Nastassja Kinski in Rome. I left messages. I asked Nastassja if she needed a housecleaner to get back to me. I asked Joni Mitchell to call my best friend to sing her Happy Birthday. She never called her.

One client I have never met. He says he is a gay man but I'm sure he's a lesbian. He subscribes to *Ms.* Magazine. He has the standard-issue lesbian record collection—Indigo Girls, k.d., Melissa—a stack of herb teas and the *Spy* magazine photo of Hillary clad like a dominatrix taped to his fridge. Besides, the place is always dirty. Messy. Dusty. So he's not fooling me.

A real life survey recently showed that house-cleaning by the people who live in their houses is declining. Forty-three percent of American women are doing less cleaning than five years ago and half as much as women did in the '60s. The study concluded: "People have better things to do with their time than clean."

Like what? Like maybe writing me stupid notes telling me what to clean. "Please do the bathrooms (she writes after two years of doing the bathrooms) and the kitchen floor (like I wouldn't) and tell me about any ants you find." I leave her a small collection of ants and other insects. "The week's yield," I write back and our correspondence continues. Who says the art of letter writing is dead?

Another important time occupier: getting the exact time on the clock. Each week as the short-wave blasts Greenwich Meantime the man and woman each stand by a clock during the time

report in order to get the time correct to the second. You can imagine what happened when I was a few minutes late to this job.

For some time I thought it odd that these two would have several books on Black Power in the study bookcase. For weeks I glanced at those books and wondered if these neurotic people who managed to talk me down four dollars and 50 cents on my quoted price—this while I stood in their new genuine gold-trimmed bathroom with five-foot open-to-the room shower—were actually progressive people with good hearts. Then, one day when I was really dusting (as opposed to fake dusting which means reading *People* magazine with the door closed), I took the books down. They were about black powder. Black powder is the substance used in gun making. They were books on how to make guns.

I quit that job the week the lady paid me in loose change and made a nasty comment on my singing.

What's the difference between a maid and a housecleaner? Some people don't know. I say it's when you are asked to service their things. Dusting is cleaning. Polishing brass do-dads with toxic lotion is not.

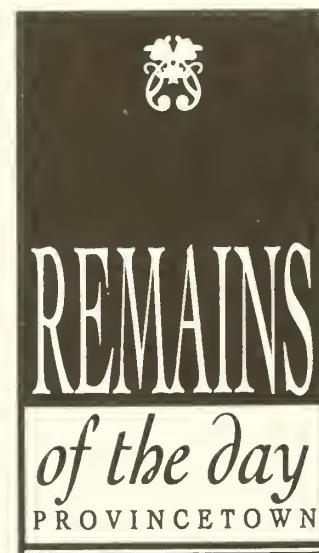
I know everything. I know who has an eating disorder. Weight Watchers in the freezer, a string of diets rotating positions on the fridge. I know the alcoholics. I know the bottles are tucked behind the bed in the spare bedroom. I know there is one in the sock drawer, behind the couch and in the clothes hamper. I watch people fight. Sometimes they try to pull me in, but I never take sides. Uh, huh, I say and flip the vacuum on.

I know who tricks every night. I know who has one-point-two million in just one of their stock portfolios. I know which husbands don't sleep with which wives. I know which wife is having an affair. I know which wife calls her husband "honey" and then, when he leaves, "the creep." I don't read diaries but I read clues. I dust birthday cards and fish behind headboards. All in the name of cleanliness. I am there when the answering machine picks up. I know all these things about all these people and they know nothing about me. All they know is my price and my phone number. ■

**LOUISE RAFKIN** is a former fellow of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Her most recent collection of essays and short stories is *Clear and Present Danger* (Cleis Press, 1992).

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BILL JENSEN, "Impasse," 1993  
oil on burlap, 32 x 24"  
Courtesy Nielsen Gallery



## The Promise of **BILL JENSEN**

by Addison Parks

THIS IS NOT the otherworldliness of spirituality. This is this world. Spirituality as the center of being, 14th Street to Tibet. Bill Jensen presumes no grand exclusive vision that I know of. He paints, and in his paintings things happen or don't. He goes places or doesn't. We go or don't. No big deal. Entirely our choice.

No longer is his painted image gratifying by being strong. He can't and won't do that for us anymore. He hasn't for some time now. Years. Maybe he spoiled us, and for that he will accept the blame. And that is the big deal. So don't

vote for him, to paraphrase someone. The story is fascinating. What happened? What happened to make him drop his sure thing, the golden sword and shield, the cherished Bill Jensen crest? You could see it coming a dozen years ago. Blow the lid off and what have you got? What's left, at the bottom, on the other side? Nothing, we fear. Nothing to live for, and paint for. To care for and get out of bed for. Lose the will and what power is there?

Bill Jensen did it. He made the leap, and now he has to face it every day. His paintings are

**Yes, the battle is still within, but it is no longer the battle: the struggle has been sublimated into the most natural expression of life: a relationship.**

just what he finds. That's all there is. For Jensen. The paintings, his paintings. His vision, but more accurately, what he sees. What he can see. All he can see.

And what does he see? What happens between the paint tube and the brush mark, the blank canvas and the place inside him? Can he reach it? Can he clear away the stuff in between, the stuff blocking the way, and then, can it reach him? Or is it even less complicated than that? Will something happen, will something meet him?

Bill Jensen paints the painting, and with his courage not only makes things happen, but lets them happen. But what does he believe? That is the question. What is at the bottom of his paintings? A dozen years ago he gave us something we could sink our teeth into, something solid we could believe. Something that approximated God. Something more than a piece of the rock. The rock itself. But then that changed. He changed. He had a son, a family. He went to Rome. These things touched him. They touch all of us.

And then what? No more rock. Something larger. The allness. Bill Jensen makes the trip to Allsville, and that's all there is. A peek at the big picture.

**BILL JENSEN HAS CHANGED** the way he goes about making a painting, so much so that it could no longer be called making a painting. It would have to be called something else. Something like maybe catching a painting, because what he is doing is a lot more like fishing than anything we would call making. Certainly the fisherman would never presume to say that he made the fish, he would merely be content to say he caught it. Bill Jensen is clearly in the business of trying to catch a painting, to land a big one, to bring one home. That would make him happy.

Fifteen years ago Jensen would make small sketches that would be shaped while riding the bus or train, while traveling to and from his studio across the East River in Williamsburg. These would be turned into drawings, shaped some more, and finally, perhaps, hammered into a painting where the promise of the sketch would flower into thin, flat scraps of oil paint on linen, edges sharply cut, contour meeting contour like pieces of a puzzle or plots of land. The process was very much one of making in the extreme, more like forging, as in the forging of steel. The image was controlled, methodical, and determined by expectations. It was tattooed, almost as though there was a code, even a set of rules about the process.

Today Jensen's paintings reflect a different

kind of honor, a different kind of conviction and determination. Yes, the battle is still within, but it is no longer the battle: the struggle has been sublimated into the most natural expression of life: a relationship. The process, attitude, and expectations have all radically changed. The value has changed. It is not quality as a value, but as an experience, and that is the value. The earlier paintings were clear and defined—sure truths. They were answers. These new paintings are murky—uncertainties. They are questions.

These latter works are beholden to no one; they are unpredictable and even contrary. They are crusty landscapes and ornery still-lifes next to the earlier iconographic heads. They have a far more reaching space. The way they are painted eludes calculation or analysis. Sometimes they seem almost painfully triumphant in defiance. They fish for the unseen, the unknown, the shy creature at the bottom, in the shadows. The shapes, the handling of paint, the choice of color have less to do with the language of painting and everything to do with staying close to the bone, to the earth, ear to the ground, the wind, the waves. Instead of fire there is longing, instead of passion there is compassion, and instead of roaring, they very quietly listen. Where the earlier work was standing up in your face, this work reclines. So pull up a chair! There is even that kind of whimsy. So who can say what is going on in these paintings?

In the end, Bill Jensen paints mysteries. Always has. And yes, in the world of painting, as in the everyday, there are boatloads, but very few good ones. As the force of painting fades from our lives, Bill Jensen's mystery paintings remain nothing short of legend. His are great mysteries.

Late this winter Nina Nielsen and John Baker dedicated the first floor of their Newbury Street gallery in Boston to a survey of Jensen's work from 1986 to 1993. It was a perfect invitation to do the otherwise unthinkable: make comparisons. Here we had works which clearly documented the revolution this artist experienced, and we got to look at them from an almost anthropological point of view.

In many ways the exhibition was a mystery explained, a marked trail across a vast, untamed continent. Painting by painting a journey from civilization into the hills unfolded. It didn't happen all at once, but instead evolved in a gradual process of letting go, reaching out, of perseverance, discovery, and fruition. Contrary to the way it might seem, Bill Jensen kept his promise. ■

**ADDISON PARKS** is a painter who lives in Cambridge.



WILLIAM W. BICKNELL, *Marine Railway*, 1937  
— Featured in the August 20th Auction —

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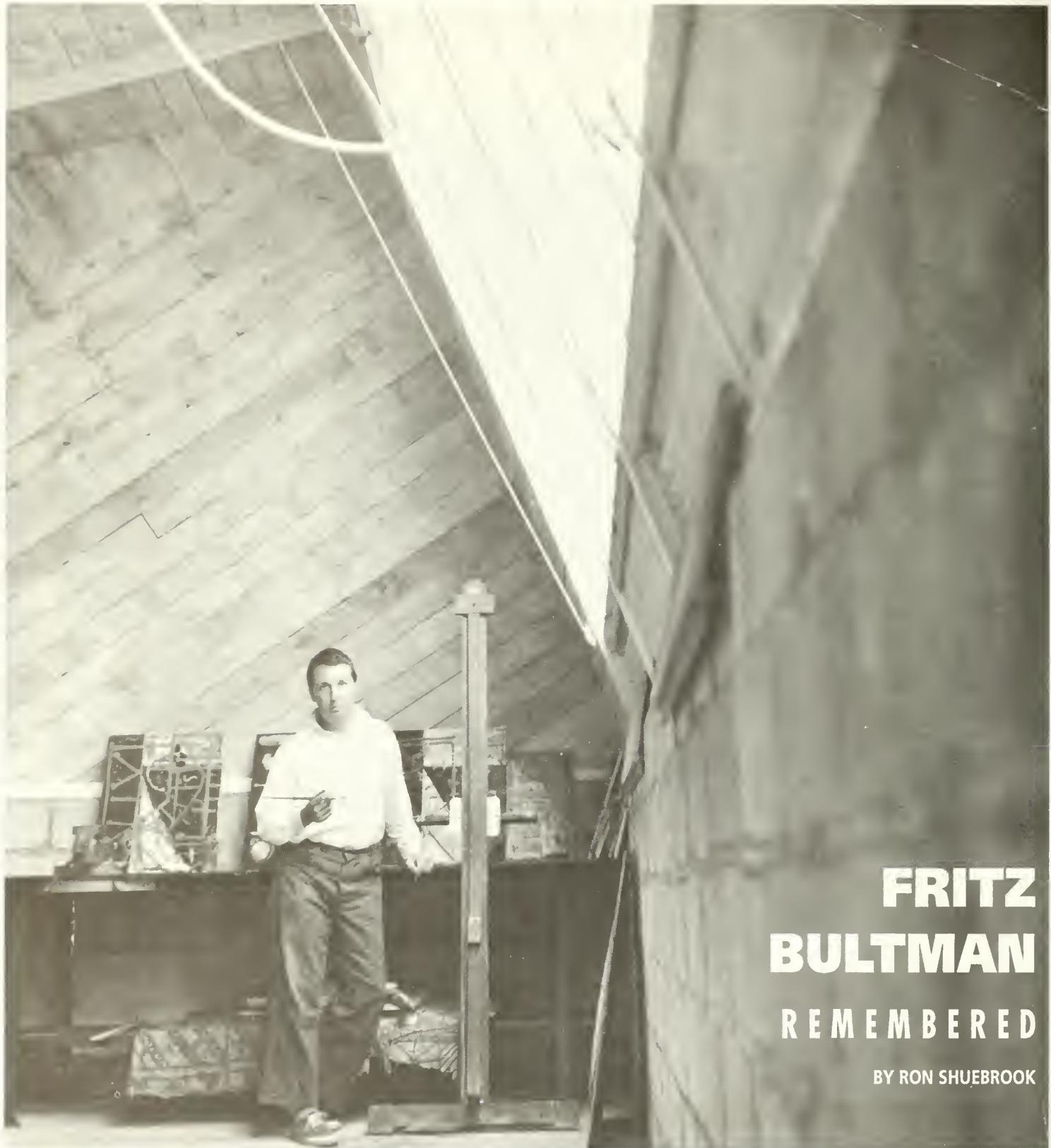
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# FRITZ BULTMAN REMEMBERED

BY RON SHUEBROOK

**M**y most vivid memory of Fritz Bultman and his work dates from a summer day in the mid-'70s when I traveled from our home in Nova Scotia to Provincetown to install an exhibition of my work at the Fine Arts Work Center. Perhaps because I was to be in town only briefly, Fritz was kind enough to invite me to his studio for the first time. Prior to this visit, I had seen only the outside of the studio which I understood had been designed by the great sculptor, Tony Smith. During my fellowship year at the Fine Arts Work Center in 1969-70, my partner, Fran, and I had enjoyed the Bultman's hospitality in their home on Miller Hill Road, but the studio had remained a mystery. I had been stimulated by the innovative functionalism of the house, its integra-

tion with the natural site, as well as by the works of art and exotic furniture that could be found in every room. I still recall a collage by Joseph Cornell and a drawing by Fielding Dawson in the kitchen, and an animal horn chair and a recent major canvas by Fritz in the living room. Visits to the Bultman home had offered us glimpses of the rich lives and diverse interests of its owners who, unlike some others in their situation, had obviously decided not to settle for a received model of calculated interior decoration or architectural fashion. This extraordinary domestic ambience contrasted greatly with the circumstances in which I was raised.

These recollections, and my continuing gratitude to Fritz for his encouragement and counsel about my work during our Provincetown

residency as well as in subsequent correspondence, heightened my sense of occasion. I was excited about the possibility of seeing his new work in the studio context and learning directly about his concerns and working processes. When I first met Fritz in 1969, I knew little about his career and had never seen his works firsthand. During our period in Provincetown, I did see several elegant figure drawings and a rope-like abstraction on paper in a group exhibition at the Work Center. In the intervening years, I sought out information about his life and art from secondary sources and had become increasingly aware of his accomplishments in a diverse number of media. Moreover, while in graduate school at Kent State University in 1971, I had fortuitously encountered his superb bronze

sculpture "Vase of the Winds II," 1961-62, in a traveling group exhibition, "Artists Abroad," at the Canton Art Center in Canton, Ohio. At the time, I was deeply affected by the mythic and cultural resonance of its image and formal invention. It seemed to present a serious challenge to the then-dominant and limited critical assumption that truly ambitious contemporary art should primarily be oriented to the solution of formal problems that had been historically determined. I was also pleased to note that this convincing sculpture was in the collection of the Whitney Museum.

My growing awareness of his career and these all-too-few engagements with his actual works suggested to me that Fritz really was an artist whose public reputation had not risen to the high level of his achievements. I felt compelled to know much more about his life and to see much more of his art. In addition, these initial personal discoveries about Fritz (and about other underrated artists in the U.S. and elsewhere) contributed to my skepticism about the legitimacy of the accounts of contemporary and historical art that were being advanced by the majority of authoritative texts of the time, and by many of the professors with whom I had studied. Unfortunately, due to my lack of confidence in my own level of knowledge, it took me a half-decade from the time that I first met Fritz until I had the courage to talk directly to him about his work.

When this opportunity finally came in the mid-'70s, I felt more than a little excitement and a considerable degree of anxiety. As I entered the light-filled studio, I was immediately struck by how this dynamic, interior space seemed to be a meeting place between the natural and the built environment. Consequently, it was not surprising to be later reminded by Fritz that Tony Smith had studied with Frank Lloyd Wright, the master of environmentally integrated architecture. With its self-evident, utilitarian construction and its angled bank of floor-to-ceiling windows, this deceptive building offered not only physical and psychological shelter but also an intimate view of the surrounding foliage and landscape. It seemed a perfect context for making art that was not only based on a need for individual invention but also on the persuasions of cultural and geographical circumstance.

I recall that Fritz was standing in front of several of his remarkable collages that, I believe, were tacked to the wall and in progress. There were several plaster and wire mesh sculptures related to "Vase" on the floor to the left. Though I cannot recall his greeting, our conversation moved easily from the collages and sculptures to the state of the art world. We talked initially about the additive and subtractive processes that he used in the building of the surface of the collages. By gluing small bits of previously painted papers together, he was able to keep the color

clear in each discrete, though interlocking, shape. He could also refine the edges of each shape by cutting away any extraneous area or by covering it with the colored plane of the adjacent form. This process enabled him to respond to the perceptual and physical experience of the piece as its expressive order unfolded, and to avoid the restrictions of the given rectangle of the commercially prepared papers. With such a strategy, Bultman was able to improvise extremely beautiful compositions which possessed a kind of pictorial inevitability that was determined by the interaction of expressive structure with an efficient method of fabrication. For pragmatic reasons, he wondered about the implications of possibly adhering the collages to canvas. I was profoundly impressed by the rigor and urgency of his inquiry and felt deeply privileged to be sharing ideas with this intensely committed and mature artist. It was quite evident to me that for Fritz each decision in his work could not be simply reduced to a matter of aesthetics.

Our conversation turned to his sculpture when I told him how much I admired his "Vase" that I'd seen in Ohio. He described how he was able to develop a vocabulary of organic forms with plaster and steel mesh that he could organize in various configurations. If desired, he could later transform the composition into a variation on a theme by cutting or altering the plaster components of the existing sculpture, and by recombining them into a new arrangement. The immediacy of the sculptural construction seemed to have obvious affinities with the directness of the method that he employed with his collages. His fluid, improvisational approach to modeled, yet constructed abstract sculpture was a revelation to me. Contrary to my earlier thinking, I became convinced by this evidence that welded steel was not the only material and process that could resist gravity, and explore the possibilities of the three-dimensional gestural image in literal space.

I'm not certain how long our discussion continued, but, quite unexpectedly at one point, Fritz broke off his remarks, and turned abruptly to me and passionately declared, "*I really love to work.*" This simple assertion of his great pleasure in the life of the studio was like an epiphany for me as a young artist still not fully aware of the depth of my own commitment to this practice. His obvious dedication to disciplined studio practice has remained a crucial example for me over the years. His resolve to produce serious and ambitious art despite relative critical neglect has helped to convince me that the most valuable personal aspect of one's life as an artist lies in the actual making of the work itself.

In recent years, however, I have happily observed the apparently growing interest in revising Fritz Bultman's place in the informed accounts of American abstract painting and sculp-

ture since the '40s. Unfortunately, consistent with popular assumptions about the usual pattern of artistic recognition, this crucial reassessment of his achievements has gathered momentum only since his death in 1985. Despite regular solo exhibitions during his lifetime at such influential New York galleries as Kootz, Stable, Martha Jackson, and Tibor de Nagy, his reputation remained modest. Since 1987, there have been several large memorial exhibitions in public museums, and a series of more compressed exhibitions in commercial galleries in New Orleans and New York. In particular, those mounted by Gallery Schlesinger seem to have contributed most substantially to the renewed interest in his work. The current comprehensive exhibition, "Fritz Bultman: A Retrospective," organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art, is circulating among several museums in the south and will be shown at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum in the fall. A substantial catalog accompanies the exhibition and contains an informative biographical essay by April Kingsley, her tellingly edited interview with Fritz by Irving Sandler, and a selection of the artist's notebook writings.

When I look at the reproductions of Fritz's work in the catalogue for this retrospective, I am reminded of the sheer visual intelligence and daring that has been evident throughout his long career. From the dense forcefulness of the imagery and pictorial structure of his 1949 canvas "The Hunter," to the spatial inventions and col-



FRITZ BULTMAN, "Vase of the Winds II," 1961-62  
bronze, 60 x 36 x 27"

Collection of Whitney Museum

facing page: "Fritz Bultman, Provincetown, 1949"  
Photo: Emerick Bronson © Condé Nast



oristic nuances of his collages from the mid-70s until his death, his art has always announced a creative identity that is both original and exacting in its distillation of the visual legacy of 20th-century abstraction. "The Hunter" was painted with a raw emotional intensity within a composition that is formally rigorous and insistently referential. The history of its making is disclosed in the brush gestures and transparent passages that comprise the interlocking shapes. It is an urgently layered painting that cannot be reduced to a crude verbal analysis but gives over its ambiguous meanings only to the attentive gaze of an open viewer. The late collages seem to demand similar perceptual conditions. As noted earlier, I observed that these collages have achieved an expressive integration of process, material, and pictorial structure. Though he certainly was mindful of Matisse's exemplary collages, Bultman's efforts in this medium seem to embody more fully an experience that is both tactile and visual. In my judgement and in that of many others, Bultman has made some of the most beautiful and accomplished collages produced in the Post-War era. They deserve serious comparison with the work of others such as those of Robert Motherwell, which are infinitely better known and accepted as among the supreme achievements in the medium.

When I turn to a photograph of his "Vase of Winds II," I am further convinced of a pressing need for reassessment of his achievement as a sculptor. The graphic illustration jogs the memory of my experience in front of the actual work. With its evocative, still-life arrangement of undulating leaf-like planes, a modeled vessel form, and a supporting rising platform, this deeply satisfying sculpture seems charged with a sense of ritual and metaphor. I note how the projected sense of fragile stability of the imagery has been intensified by the orchestration of light and shade, as well as by the repetition of nearly related elements. The flattened foot of the vase-like volume almost mirrors the horizontal plane of the lower platform, and establishes an internal relationship that refers to the external fact of the parallel floor on which the viewer stands. The shadowed, narrow zone directly above the platform causes the vase element to appear to hover and, therefore, to defy the material facts. The recognition links our literal and perceptual experiences to the aesthetic expression of the sculpture—which uncannily acknowledges and resists the physical forces of the world. When this particular work returns to the Whitney Museum following the retrospective, it should be shown regularly beside the other important examples of abstract expressionist sculpture.

In addition to the various exhibitions and attendant catalogues that have signaled Fritz Bultman's reemergence as an historically significant artist, important writers have recently in-



FRITZ BULTMAN, "Mardi-Gras," 1978  
collage of painted papers, 96 x 48"

cluded him in their accounts of his historic period. For example, in her 1992 book, *The Turning Point*, April Kingsley makes an emphatic yet critical analysis of the New York art world of 1950, which places Fritz meaningfully among his peers. Other informative articles by B.H. Friedman and Budd Hopkins combine with Bultman's own published commentary to elucidate his previously unacknowledged importance. My modest hope and realistic expectation is that the finest of his available works will be acquired by important public institutions and exhibited on a regular basis. Such crucial placements of his most significant works in public collections would ensure a greater likelihood that he will find his rightful place, honored among the finest practitioners of abstraction in America. ■

Acknowledgement: I wish to thank Fran Gallagher-Shuebrook for her invaluable assistance with this article.

—Ron Shuebrook

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by Sarah Randolph



RICHARD BAKER, "Shield," 1993  
oil on canvas  
Courtesy of Joan Washburn Gallery

**STILL LIFE**—a painting whose determining quality is the unmovingness of its subject. The gaze shifts, but what is looked at remains silent. Nothing happens. Art critic Norman Bryson says: "Still life is the world minus its narratives or, better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest . . . Still life pitches itself at a level of material existence where nothing exceptional occurs: there is a wholesale eviction of Event."

The still life has some quality akin to the prose poem, the way it meditates on the boundaries of place and object. It is by its nature reassuring. The still life speaks of presence, of the nourishing quality of objects (fruit, loaves, fish). It is an art of refuge, of return—through the thingness of things back to the fact of our own existence.

But the still life is also an art of irony. It comments on our domestic lives, on society's preoccupation with abundance, examining us by looking at what we own. In this way the still life partakes of our ambivalence about the things around us, the way they remind us of our material nature. We like to think of ourselves as spirit, but we are dross, mortal, indelibly physical.

What does it mean to paint an object? To sit with it and watch nothing move. By looking at it, you submit yourself to its gaze—it studies you.

I first saw Richard Baker's still lifes in a 1989 group show at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. I was struck immediately by how risky his paintings seemed in scale and in subject—here were *small paintings of flowers*. How perversely big those images made themselves.

One of the paintings, "Six Fancy Tulips," was reproduced on the exhibition postcard. It showed a group of orange lily-flowered tulips which seemed to nibble at the top edge of the canvas with sharp mouths. They swayed above a brown landscape where two smokestacks squatted, one silent, one steaming. I took the postcard home and taped it to the cover of a notebook I was starting, to be a kind of governing icon.

S T I L L

## The Paintings of RICHARD BAKER

L I F E

December, 1993. A new show of Richard Baker's work opens at the Washburn Gallery in New York. The paintings are hung like a row of small windows around the square room, windows looking out onto scenes at once impossible and deeply familiar. I stop for a long time at three of them.

"Shield": Four muscular tulips float in midair, dominating the sky. The leaves are thick and fleshy, the stems like rods, the flower-heads, deep purple or white, almost solid-seeming. The tulips cross over each other in the sky, and as they cross they jumble slightly. At first glance they look intact, but soon it's apparent that the stems don't line up, that the arrangement is plausible but impossible. There's a kind of anxiety in the mismatch, a restlessness. A few faint clouds float in the pale, yellow-green sky. Below is a vague landscape, a blurred field or beach where the paint is scraped thin to reveal the canvas weave.

"Snapper": Three fish on a yellow board, held at the vertical. By some miracle they don't slip down out of the frame. Instead they gaze heavenward, the yellow board like a halo that "makes saints out of them" (as Rilke says). But what odd saints, wide-eyed, gloomy, impassive, their small fins helpless on land, their mouths closed firmly. They stare up at a blue-white sky, a hazy glare. The horizons play with them. Between one pair of fish-heads, a whitened sea, through another, a deep blue-green. To one side of the board, a tiny strip of horizon so distant we barely glimpse its green hill, to another, a full landscape of water and woods. As if each time we look at the painting we stand in a different place, inhabiting different angles of view.

"Scissors, Hammer": A pair of metal scissors and a worn mallet sit on a fickle tabletop whose planes won't quite resolve. All the world is shifting as we look. The yellow sky pushes towards us. The horizons find themselves where they will—one watery sliver just edging over the table on the left, one tiny sea finding itself between the scissors' open blades, a wedge of dark green field with road or river and its own ocean, slipped in like a pizza slice on the far right. This anxiety of place is becoming familiar. But the

objects themselves have the solid presence of long use, they are known. They are intimate with each other, the metal scissors yearning open-mouthed over the wooden mallet, and why shouldn't they feel desire? There is a sharp-edged blade, there is a surface of pounding, there are places for the hands to curve through. And our gaze falls on them like the light does, following curves and angles, wanting to slip into the hollows, but unable to.

ocean or field visible in the corners. But we never doubt that his objects are human, part of the human world. Under his hand they are anthropomorphized: the three fish with their morose optimism, the huddle of stones, the impatient scissors and the stoic mallet. They loom over the tiny fields, the faint trees.

When asked about the small scale of his work, Baker says, "the painting has the same physical relationship to my body as the object." We have met up again a month later when the gallery is quiet, to talk more about the paintings. We stand close to them, then step back, move close, then step back, in a dance reminiscent of the pavane. I point to features of the paintings, areas where the paint is thick, or thin, places where the eye shifts, where planes meet. Baker points to boundaries, borders, margins, telling me that edges are the most important places in a painting. They are where shapes are defined, where all the events in the painting occur.

And the paintings are edgy, the objects push right up against the edges of their tables, risking the precipice—one group of pebbles has the demeanor of lemmings wondering whether to take the leap. The rubber hats and masks appear actually to hang out over the brink. And the flowers push right to the edges of the canvas, the edges of the represented sky, sometimes with as little clearance as a quarter inch. "On the edge," Baker says, accepting the literary ramifications of the image. *On edge*, too, I think.

At a nearby Greek restaurant we sit down to big plates of moussaka and brown mugs of coffee, talking until one by one the other patrons leave and the early winter dusk crosses the street windows.

We talk about objects—what role do they serve in the paintings? I ask Baker if he thinks the paintings could work without their central subjects, as abstractions, formal studies, and he laughs. The day before, a friend challenged him with the idea that the "backgrounds" are becoming paintings in their own right. Baker is entertaining the thought, but I find myself arguing for the presence of objects, for their eloquence and tenderness, for their humor.

He talks about the conceptual layers of the painting—he calls them "the form thing," "the flat thing," and "the function thing." I think I understand the "form thing"—the paintings' formal underpinnings, the interplay of its shapes. The "flat thing" is the way the painting exists simultaneously as an object in its own right, and as the image of an object—flat paint on a three-dimensional object (the boxy canvas), depicting another world of depth and objecthood. It is the last of these that I'm puzzled about, the "function thing," and as Baker begins to explain it, it seems at the heart of his work, the real knot of it.

Objects in a painting, cups, say, or fruit, can never actually be used in their functional capacity. You can't pick up the cup and drink, bite into the fruit. So what the painter is left to work with are the other qualities that objects have, their visual form, their associations, their intangible objectness. When the function of the object is taken away, we are left (though Baker never used these words) with something like its spiritual value. If we are frustrated in our desire to *use* the object, we can be returned to the fact of its *presence*.



RICHARD BAKER, "Snapper," 1993  
oil on canvas  
Courtesy of Joan Washburn Gallery



RICHARD BAKER, "Scissors, Hammer," 1993  
oil on canvas  
Courtesy of Joan Washburn Gallery

In art school, Baker tells me, he lost faith in paint, in the capacity of paint to carry meaning. He turned towards conceptual work, painting pictures of blank index cards, paper, empty notebooks in lumpy paint which he adulterated with coffee grounds and dirt for texture. He painted these objects exactly to scale, so the painted index card was the same size as a real index card, the painted envelope as a real envelope.

The scale tempted the viewer to want to use them, but the lumpy paint kept them at a remove from the functional. "They were all surfaces waiting for information, inspiration," he says now, looking back.

Some of that imagery is sneaking into his new work—the last painting he finished before the show depicted a piece of paper cut into the shape of Baker's head (with its characteristically large ears!) sitting at the edge of a table beside the clay model of a hand. A kind of ironic self-portrait, where the objects made by the artist are stand-ins for the artist himself.

Increasingly, Baker's still lifes are putting themselves at an extra level of remove from world. This new body of work contains several paintings of objects which are themselves representations—a group of plastic squid, plastic animal noses, and most importantly a group of rubber hats and masks.

In one painting we see a mound of fruit, but the mound of fruit won't sit like a mound. It is oddly flattened, it tilts, and beneath it, where we expect shadow, is a strange, flesh-colored band. I first saw the piece in Baker's studio and tried unsuccessfully to figure out what was so strange about the fruit. Then I turned, and hanging on a nearby ladder was a floppy rubber hat with a fleshy inside like a bathing cap, studded on the outside with the bright impression of fruit in bas relief. At that moment the painting shifted. Before, there was fruit that wouldn't quite resolve into its dimensions, after, there was

RICHARD BAKER, "Plumb Line," 1993  
oil on canvas  
Courtesy of Joan Washburn Gallery



#### *Plumb Line (Tulips)*

*How much did Pythagoras know? His salutations, an encyclopedia caught in a flicker of the eyes. Two smooth flowers use the horizon, its taste of yellow, to name the indivisible, altering his hypothesis with their absorption. Their avowals persist without anger. They are chopped, mortal, but undiminished, their bodies held in robes, two specimen priestesses. If there is a lament, it is enclosed, cultured in a space, a cream thatch soaked in childhood. The sound of electrons spinning is a motor, keeping the planes hopeful, the window ringing, until the parched eyelid of the sky becomes a shrine for forgetting the unforgettable.*

rubber, a limp hat with no head to fill it, something set down while its owner stepped away.

Sitting in front of the plastic squid or the rubber fruit hat, Baker can remain utterly faithful to the object he is painting, and still be playful about the reality of the world he depicts. He bought the fruit hat because it looked just like the piles of fruit he was already painting. By painting the hat in the fruit's stead he can maintain a dual loyalty to the real and the surreal, a dual citizenship.

The masks are perhaps the riskiest work in the show. One is of a baker(!), the other of a red-faced "Indian." They introduce the figure into the still life in a way that's much more startling than the subtle personhood of his fish or tools, and so they interrogate the very idea of still life. With these pieces Baker brings to the forefront his questions about perception and illusion, about the faithfulness of depiction and the purposes of the activity of painting. "*Masking*," he says to me, so the way the painting itself becomes a mask is immediately apparent.

"The true purpose of masks," says Salman Rushdie, "is not concealment but transformation."

After art school (at the Maryland Institute in Baltimore, then at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston), Baker came to Provincetown, and searched for a new way into painting. "I picked the still life," he says, "because it was the dumbest, most flat-footed genre I could think of. I started with the most overused subject matter—flowers—and I used it in the dumbest way I could. I just set them square-on in the middle of the canvas, against a color field. Gradually, the color field became a real field, a landscape."

Baker is suspicious of any kind of ease in painting. He is unwilling to let novelty of subject matter do his work for him. Unwilling, even, to rely on his skill as a painter. He uses bad brushes and other tricks to keep the act of painting difficult. In some of these new paintings, he has laid a thick mat of acrylic down over one area, and glued it to the canvas before priming.

So the canvas he works on is no longer even—there's a raised area, a rectangle placed almost randomly. It gives him something to struggle against, a ridge to press across, a feature on the geography of the canvas to keep the paintbrush from travelling too smoothly.

Critics have usually seen Baker's paintings—especially his flowers that float mid-air—in the tradition of surrealism, but their impossibility doesn't bring to mind dream images, the subconscious. Instead, their dislocation seems to be about *seeing*. As you sit before an object, the eye locates it again and again from different angles, and the mind gradually lifts it out of its surroundings. As if the very force of perceiving causes a kind of levitation.

February. A letter arrives from Baker, narrow white pages covered with blue writing:

*I am still involved in a debate with myself of why the "object" in my painting is necessary....Philip Guston posited that there can be "too much 'art' and not enough 'nourishment,'" and I suspect that painting without the "object" would be just that kind of art for me....*

*It is true that one can be moved by paint as an evocative material expressing some sense of the world, but if that ability or aspect of paint can be coupled with its ability to describe, then it may be possible to have something truly and perversely unique, and perhaps closer to what it is actually like to perceive the world (perception, after all, is a matter of looking and seeing).*

Years ago, I spent a few weeks in Paris during a rainy spring, and gradually the grey sky, like the grey stones of the city, began to weigh down on me. I went into the Orangerie again, and saw the Cezanne still lifes as if for the first time. They were a revelation. Apples. I felt as if standing in front of them saved me. Rilke says: "in Cezanne [the fruits] cease to be edible altogether, that's how thinglike and real they become, how simply indestructible in their stubborn existence."

"There must be objects," Wittgenstein says, "if the world is to have an unalterable form." "The world of the ten thousand things," Buddhists call this existence.

Baker's dead fish, his fish heads, his slabs of meat, his flowers, are not reminders of transience—they do not bring to mind that ineffable Japanese sense of *mono no aware*, the feeling we get when we remember that the present moment is in the act of leaving us. If they are re-

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ment is in the act of leaving us. If they are reminders, they bring us back to materiality. To the physical presence of the things of this earth.

Rilke says: "Perhaps we are here in order to say: house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window—at most: column, tower...but to say them, you must understand, oh to say them more intensely than they ever dreamed of existing."

It's curious I keep thinking of Rilke, whose melodramatic sincerity is exactly the kind of tone Baker steers away from. But in another sense it seems apt—there is something metaphysical in these paintings, for all their self-consciousness and playfulness. They have something of the quality of icons.

When he sits before his objects, Baker seems to lapse out of irony and into contemplation. As if he becomes seduced by them.

The still life has always seemed to me an essentially religious subject in its quality of long contemplation, in its humility. Among the "great" genres—icon, landscape, figure—it may seem modest. We often think of the artist in his or her studio, arranging and rearranging flowers or pieces of fruit. There is something almost funny in the image, something domestic, anti-heroic.

The choice of so antiheroic a subject becomes an heroic act. It is a claiming of the domestic, of the ordinary. "Attention itself gains the power to transfigure the commonplace," says Bryson. Or in poet Barbara Jordan's language: "All things become sacred from long gazing."

In his letter, Baker pointed me towards an essay by Thomas Lawson, who posits painting as a last exit from the dilemmas of postmodernism, a kind of radical freedom the existentialists might have appreciated, a joke turned back on irony itself. It is the very perversity of painting that appeals to Lawson, the fact that painting might be chosen as a tool in this age of skepticism, irony, and despair, precisely because it is "the medium that requires the greatest amount of faith."

Still life—I always feel the echo of the variant reading, that life persists, that we are still here. Stubborn life. ■

**SARAH RANDOLPH** is a poet whose work has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Sonora Review*, and elsewhere. She is editor and publisher of Cosmos Press.

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# BORIS MARGO: "To Paint and To Dream in the Paint"

by Martica Sawin

Toward the end of February, 1941, the young English surrealist Gordon Onslow Ford completed his series of talks on surrealism at the New School with words of praise for several American artists who he welcomed to the surrealist fold, among them William Baziotes and Boris Margo. Works by both artists were included in a concurrent exhibition at the New School, along with paintings by Jimmy Ernst, Stanley William Hayter and the younger surrealist refugees. Margo, however, was no novice ready to be annexed to surrealism. He had developed a surrealist technique and imagery of his own by the mid-1930s when he began to use a decalcomania technique as a starting point for the unfolding of visionary imagery. His use of this process, involving "blotting" a freshly painted surface with a sheet of paper which is then pulled off leaving strange textures and configurations, led to accusations of imitation by Max Ernst when he saw these works in 1943. However, as the comprehensive exhibition of Margo's work at the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery in the fall of 1993 made clear, Margo had long since charted an independent artistic path that led the way into automatist processes in the days when social realism held sway in New York.

This exhibition gave a New York audience its first opportunity to see in depth Margo's ground-breaking work of the 1930s and '40s and convincingly demonstrated that he stood firmly in the vanguard in those years when American artists were struggling to free themselves from the alternatives of realism and derivative abstraction. Margo had already won his freedom when he arrived in the U.S. in the early 1930s after a circuitous journey via Canada and Cuba from his native Russia. Growing up close to the Polish/Russian border, he lived through the First World War and the Russian Revolution and its tumultuous aftermath. He was among the chosen who were able to attend the official art academy in Leningrad, but he escaped its constraints to work with the impoverished outsider Filonov. Through the latter he learned to love Bosch and to paint from the realm of fantasy. He described the process encouraged by Filonov as one of moving outward from a single point to line and thence to form. In other words he learned a mode of improvisation whose genesis was in the work itself, dictated by the imagination or the vagaries of the process; he was to say to his

nephew years later, while walking, "Don't look up, Murray [Zimiles], always look down." In spite of his non-conformity, the Soviet government gave Margo a travel award to complete the "masterwork" required for his diploma; this made it possible for him to leave Russia and never look back.

During his first years in New York, too poor to buy paint, he worked mainly in montage using cut-outs from the old magazines he could find in abundance; fragments would be selected in a process of free association and chance juxtapositions would open the doors of his imagination. By the time he painted "Untitled," 1936, the earliest work in the exhibition, he had developed a vocabulary of the implausible—a red jigsaw puzzle piece of a landscape, contradictions between atmospheric space and opaque barrier or between biomorphic fantasies and illusionistically rendered horses

and figures, and high-keyed flat color opposed to shadowy earth tones. Nineteen-thirty-six was the year of the Museum of Modern Art's "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism" exhibition and the work of Miro and Dali could also be seen in the New York galleries, so it's possible that exposure to this art reinforced the direction which Margo had taken. An interest in surrealism is something he would have shared with his close friend Arshile Gorky and it may be that Margo's visionary paintings helped to open the way toward Gorky's mature style.

What the exhibition made clear through its range of works was Margo's receptivity to the suggestions arising from experimental processes, usually of his own devising. His paintings emerge at the juncture of exquisite control, delicate workmanship, and the chance fruits of experimentation. It is this combination of intentionality with the fortuitous that gives his art its mysterious blend of the literal and the fantastic. A painting that started with decalcomania like the exhibition's "Untitled," 1939, is carried to a meticulous finish and offers a teeming network of quasi-organic forms in which we recognize everything and nothing and are left hovering on the border of dream and reality. "I believe people should finish a painting when they look at it," Margo said.

During the early 1940s Margo's paintings were among the most fully realized works produced by that intermix of younger refugee surrealists and their American friends, called at the time

His paintings emerge at the juncture of exquisite control, delicate workmanship, and the chance fruits of experimentation.



"Abstract Surrealism." His "Personages in Radiant Motion," 1942, inspired, he said, by an open hearth, has many affinities, although it is more resonant in color and spatially complex, with the volcanic paintings such as "Listen to Living," that Matta was doing at the time. For many years Margo shared a studio with Mark Rothko and there are paintings in the Rosenfeld show, particularly "Untitled," c. 1944, that bear a strong resemblance to the dozens of works on paper from the surrealist phase of Rothko's work. Both artists were working with brush drawing over wash to delineate semi-figurative presences in a hallucinatory space, but Margo's are free-floating, fluent, illuminated with auras, in contrast to the scratchy, tentative quality of the Rothkos.

As one contemplates Margo's work in the context of the hybridizing process that was going on in New York, it seems amazingly self-sufficient and fully realized. The effects he achieved with color and translucency, his complex multi-dimensional spaces, his ability to make palpable the fantastic, are joined in an art that seductively leads the viewer into imaginary worlds. Unmindful of the heroics that began to change American art in the later 1940s, he continued to pursue his own visionary path. In 1967 he still reiterated: "The only thing to keep the spirit is the act of doing, to paint and to dream in the paint." ■

MARTICA SAWIN's book, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*, will be published by MIT Press in 1995.

BORIS MARGO "From An Ominous Chord," c. 1945  
mixed media and cellocut on paper, 16 x 21"

# On MARY HACKETT: Two Paintings and a Note

by Keith Althaus

Open almost any book of "folk art" and you find an obligatory disclaimer about the inadequacy of the terminology and definitions of the field. We can dispense with that. "Self-taught," "eccentric," or whatever, Mary Hackett was a profoundly original artist. Her work, over half a century, will stand beside any. Though there is debate whether we should call the work of certain societies "art," either because they were not intended as such, or because there may not be such a designation within that culture, its power is undiminished. We can learn from that: better to look at the pictures.

## "Khrushchev When He Got Booted"

What draws me first into this inspired painting is the pathos, even humor, of the situation. But what holds me there is its powerful psychological atmosphere, unleashing several unnerving emotions not confined to the title drama. One is that peculiar sensation, due perhaps to association with search and interrogation, or with helplessness and the inherent danger and threat of being in the path of a car's headlights. A man in a suit in the woods at night is similarly disconcerting. One can't help but feel a suit is poor protection from the cold, and that however powerful our light, eventually the dark prevails. This little painting abounds with feelings of powerlessness and inevitability.

This picture is both unique and typical of Mary Hackett. Propelled by a scene, incident, or event, she casts it in its fullest implication, yet it remains in some way personal, nothing is inflated, there is no reaching. This "knowing" its place in the order of things is a kind of pre-science not uncommon to the self-taught, the eccentric, or the visionary artist. While others seek discovery, or solutions to self-imposed questions, or even revelation in the painting process, these artists have no inclination to experiment but are concerned with faithfully recording, and with execution. On the backs of her paintings, where she often made pointed observations and revisionist commentary, she sometimes complained of her lack of skill but



not her vision. In the beautiful painting of her father reading in an armchair, her father has no legs, because as she remarks on the back she "couldn't get them right." Those whose work is a composite of consciously chosen influences with a mandatory effort at newness can hardly compete for directness and natural power with those to whom an authentic vision has been granted. Those with a vision are charged with presentation rather than interpretation. Their truth is a given.

## "Christmas on Bridge Street"

1939, Ft. Lauderdale

This painting is about joy. Inexplicable joy, that fills us for no reason. A balmy day outside the window, and you are alone in the house at Christmas. The dog has climbed onto the sofa, and then, as Yeats says:

*My body of a sudden blazed;  
And twenty minutes more or less  
It seemed so great my happiness,  
That I was blessed and could bless.*

This is a secret the artist shares with us: while everyone was out I felt this. Peace, serenity, bliss: words from the vocabulary of religious experience describe it best, but it doesn't resemble the ecstasy of mystic revelation, more a messageless acceptance. Rather than a transporting, it represents a returning, back to this body, this room, this afternoon, away from the distractions of desire and concern. Mary Hackett's paintings have always had a mild hallucinatory quality: her isolation of objects, clock, stove, typewriter,



in a spare environment raises their status to that disassociative level Tennyson sought when he would stand in front of the mirror and repeat his name 50 times. Her wavering yet solid line sometimes seems, not impossibly, the border of world; the austere, almost monastic walls heighten the effect. Her colors, neither gaudy nor jewel-like, have the harmony of another world: a minor chord, her haunting palette, resembling the colors of Indian corn.

There is an unquestioning quality about her work. We are spared "effort" and "effect." We feel everything she painted was important to her, at least in that moment. And because that obedience to what mattered, as opposed to fads and trends, guided her, most of her work "stands up" over 50 years. It convinces utterly and effortlessly. And with that saved effort we are able to expend our energy exploring and savoring the details, and the mysterious currents just

below the surface. Her work is generally devoid of the qualities that distinguish the well-known "memory" painters of our time: sweetness and sentimentality. She shares with them a certain charm, an almost obsessive faithfulness to detail, a narrative directness and truth, and a lack of trickery and deception. She differs from them mainly in the complexity and the quality of her feelings. This painting for instance does not pretend to resolve the numerous contradictions and tensions within it: loneliness contrasted with the sociality of the season, the secular with the sacred, sparseness with clutter, interior with exterior worlds (even in this calm backwater one senses the dark historical moment). But all are overridden, reduced to background noise, chatter down below, small and insignificant as voices in jars. A grand harmony drowns such "minor" discords. There is a place from which all things, even the most opposing, as Breton said, "cease to be perceived as contradictory." In such a place, often, and in many locations, Mary Hackett set her easel.

#### Note

I was moved by a photo in the local paper of her wonderful painting "Western School," 1941, whose faceless children led me to think about that recurrent image of emptiness and about her comfort with the absent. I have chosen to write about two paintings which represent ends of a wide spectrum. One is entirely imagined, prompted by the public announcement of the ousting of Soviet Premier Khrushchev. The other, the interior of a house in Florida, with her beloved dog Muffy Charge on the sofa, comes from the artist's life. Disparate as they are, each is imbued with a special quality, one of the hallmarks of her work: they are at once intimate and mysterious. Although she worked in essentially the same style all her life, amid the ferment of the lively Provincetown art colony, she brought to her work a freshness and freedom, surpassing novelty, of conception and execution.

Mary Hackett was perhaps as singular and remarkable in her person as in her art. And for many the two were inseparable. When I see her quiet "Angel in the Public Garden," or the gorgeous "Statue of E.E. Hall," exhibited briefly at the Provincetown Art Association last fall, I suppress a smile, remembering this was the woman who liked to paint statues because "they stand still." I fell in love with these paintings years ago. Now if I fail to convince others of their beauty I will assume that the chemistry or the moment was wrong, and, because in a labor of love there is no tiredness, like a determined suitor I will try again. ■

**KEITH ALTHAUS** is the author of a book of poems, *Rival Heavens*, published by the Provincetown Arts Press.



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by Joan Lebold Cohen

**H**ow does a nice Chinese artist from Shanghai get to Wellfleet? The unlikely answer was, "via Texas." C. Meng who looks as if he could fit into the long, lanky cowboy stereotype, has been teaching and exhibiting in Texas for five years—as well as in national and international venues. He was also one of the hundreds of thousands of artists, intellectuals, dissidents and economic refugees in the massive Chinese diaspora of the 1980s. Some left the motherland seeking freedom from totalitarianism, and others sought the beautiful country, where the streets are paved with gold—the Chinese word for America is "Meigou," literally "beautiful country."

I asked Meng why he decided to leave China. He told of the hard times his family endured during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76: "Our family had a black mark. My father had worked for the Guomintang [Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist party, which was militarily defeated by the Communists in 1949]. Because of his past he was considered untrustworthy and therefore he was forced to work hard labor that paid less than a subsistence wage. My mother was a high school teacher who was denounced because of



C. MENG, "Between," 50 x 50", canvas

her political viewpoint. Due to not following the line of Mao Zedong's thought, she was savagely criticized by the students and faculty in struggle meetings and beaten up by the Red Guards. [Like many thousands of other teachers and officials during the Cultural Revolution.] She was labeled a 'counter revolutionary' and was sent to prison. After six months her wounds were so severe and her distress so acute that she was sent to a mental hospital to recover. My uncle, her brother, owned a school in Hong Kong and that was considered to be suspicious and well as foreign. My sister, who was 17, was sent to Jilin for 10 years, a northeastern province, near Siberia, where minus-40-degree winters last for more than three months. Although my sister was eventually able to resettle in a province near Shanghai she has never been permitted to return and live in Shanghai itself.

"I was more fortunate. I was permitted to stay at home, and after high school I could work in a factory or go to technical school. I'd spent lots of time doing calligraphy, so my high school teacher recommended that I go to a technical art school." It was about that time that Premier Zhou Enlai had called for the schools to resume.

After the Cultural Revolution began, there had been a six-year hiatus (1966-72), when schools had stopped accepting students. During that hiatus, Meng read some French and Russian novels through an "underground borrowing" route, and those books revealed a world beyond China that he dreamed of experiencing.

After the Cultural Revolution ended, Meng went on to graduate from Shanghai's Teachers University in 1982 and subsequently teach there for three years. He continued his studies at Miami University, Ohio, where he got an MFA in 1988. Then he went to teach in Texas.

"But how did you make the Wellfleet connection?" I wondered. "When I was at the Shanghai airport departing for the U.S. in 1986, I met Marry Young, who was returning to America after teaching in China. We became friends and she had one of my paintings. She summers in Orleans, and, when she came to the Cape after her return from China, she brought my painting to be framed at the Wellfleet Frame Shop that is run by the artist and Kendall Gallery owner, Walter Dorrell. Walter liked my work and asked me to send slides. Then he invited me to come and paint with him

and show at the gallery."

1994 marks the fifth year in a row in which Meng has shown at the Kendall Gallery. When visitors see his sophisticated illusionistic forms and oil technique, many are surprised to learn that he is Chinese—surprised because Westerners don't expect a Chinese to be a master of oil painting and chiaroscuro modeling. "Chinese painting" usually evokes an image of misty landscapes elegantly defined with a few strokes of black ink on rice paper.

In fact, many Chinese have used techniques of deep space and chiaroscuro modeling since the beginning of the 20th century and most Chinese students who have gone to art school in China since 1949 have learned Western illusionistic painting. Meng works in both modes with complete confidence and fluency.

With a uniquely fresh manner, Meng combines these conventions to reveal the two worlds in which his head resides, China and America: "Although I use traditional Chinese art language as well as Western vocabulary in my painting, it is not my intention to make cultural comparisons or to describe a particular cultural identity. My work may show comparison, but only because I'm the product of a specific culture and time. I paint because I love to make images—sometimes abstract, sometimes realistic, sometimes using Chinese brush painting, language marks, stamp marks, or marks made just for their own sake."

His expression is in keeping with the current preoccupation of self-reflection focusing on identity—an issue central to many Asian-Americans. As they had settled in a country with an alien culture and a white majority, they discover themselves to be always different. So many Asians have settled in America since immigration laws changed in 1965, and from that very talented group many artists and writers are ad-



dressing themes of identity. Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston and David Henry Hwang are well-known examples. In New York this spring the Asia Society presented the exhibition, *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*, one of many such thematic shows this season.

In "Yellow Cab," Meng's imagery shows his mental commuting between two worlds. A yellow cab speeds across the bottom of the paint-

ing. Above the cab are a series of loosely and unevenly scrawled Chinese characters and some unspecified strokes that hover like a low-flying cloud. Or is it a wall? The writing consists of instructions on how to paint traditional Chinese paintings. The written form recalls large character posters used during Chinese political campaigns to convey ideological messages and individual criticisms. During the 1980s and '90s, when official Chinese policy switched away from class struggle to economic growth, such spaces have been filled with advertising signs. Meng transforms what could have become a pop art collage into a precise, painterly unity of idea and image. "My intention," he said, "is to test the limit of standards to find the itchy spot. I'm testing my own limits."

"Between" surely shows his itchy spot. Part of a black metal folding chair is on the left side of this large canvas, and part of a Chinese-style bamboo chair, partially rubbed out, is on the right. The chairs sit squared off, like boxers in their respective corners before the bout begins. "Between" is written in English in the center of the blank space between the two, and next to it is the Chinese character for chair—so that, read together, the meaning is "between chairs." Mostly undecipherable English words appear at the bottom of the canvas, and phrases from a Chinese painting manual appear in partially obliterated Chinese words across the top. He explains, "I use writing in my painting because I'm interested in why we make marks and how we respond to them. Telling a story is not my intention. The marks appear as some hidden message in the structure—the whole background of culture hidden under the language. There is no literal meaning."

In China, Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken is like Coca Cola, a symbol of America. When the restaurant opened in Beijing near Tiananmen Square in the late 1980s the responses ranged from total outrage to junkie ecstasy. Was Colonel Sanders' capitalist fat going to be a fatal cholesterol for China or was this part of the by-pass surgery needed to become a great power? In "Country Chicken" the artist places part of the Colonel's cartoonish face and the candy striped red and white awning right next to the tile-roofed red wall of the Forbidden City. But wait a minute. They both are painted Colonel Sanders' color red. The true imperial red of the Forbidden City was enriched with pinks and browns quite different from this unmodulated fast-food plastic red. Has this Emperor of fried chicken painted the town red?

C. Meng painted "Country Chicken" on a return trip to China. It reads like the diary of his return and China's changes. ■

JOAN LEBOLD COHEN writes about Asian and Asian-American art and film.



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MIRA SCHOR, "Semi-colon in Flesh," 1993  
oil on linen, 12 x 16"  
Collection: Jon Weaver

by Johanna Drucker

In the fall of 1993, Mira Schor's work was exhibited at the Horodner-Romley Gallery in New York. This was a choice opportunity to see Schor's work of the last few years installed to advantage. Whether presented individually or in sequentially ordered panels, her paintings display a jewel-like finish and meticulous worked quality, reminiscent of Flemish altarpieces, while the subject matter breaks new ground in contemporary theory. This seeming contradiction—between traditional painting and up-to-date concerns—is reconciled at the level of the medium.

Schor forges an inseparable bond between the facture of painterly treatment and the deconstructive critique of patriarchy and power to which she has long been committed. The very codes of mastery, fine finish, virtuoso control of oil, pigment, glaze, drafting skill and rendering ability are associated historically with a masculinist "old master" tradition. Thus Schor's use of these techniques inscribes her criticisms in a subversion of the medium through its own means—as Komar and Melamid, for instance, first inverted the terms of Socialist Realism through an appropriative gesture or Sherrie Levine pointedly focused the lens of the camera back onto the modern masters of photographic spectacle. Schor has long believed that painting is an arena in which an interrogation of the values of patriarchal and masculinist culture may be staged—as well as one in which an alternative vision may be rendered.

But painting, Schor's work continually reminds us, is not merely a matter of creating images on a surface for the sake of communica-

cating through symbolism. Painting is also a physical, bodily act, one in which the artist constructs a situation of pleasure, a practice of narcissistic self-involvement with material, sensuality of touch, movement, pressure and gesture—all of which are traced in the response of the pigment on the canvas. This sensuality, still available to the viewer as a nuanced play of surface treatments, textures, layering, veiling, and luminous glazes, manifests itself as the embodiment of a feminist gaze, one empowered by its own laws, permissions, and convictions. It is important to note here that Schor is not involved with some transcendent image of the feminine. Instead, she is engaged with a specific social and historical construction of a feminist critical position: "I want to engage with the metaphorically expressive possibilities of the materiality of painting, trusting in the complexity of visual language, in order to reinvest painting with the energy of a different politics, a politics of difference, and a different eroticism than that of the monocular penis."

In this recent show, Schor showed several long sections from *Area of Denial* and *War Frieze*. Major works, these are ambitious projects whose epic scale is perhaps belied at first glance through the small size of the panels sequentially assembled to form their whole. But the narrative content of *War Frieze* is well-integrated in the formal structure of the piece. Sequentially ordered panels (12 x 16") assembled into a frieze literally stretch a point across space, around corners, and into view. The ribbon of paint echoes the linear flow of the language which moves

## Mira Schor: Area of DENIAL

letter by letter or word by word through the modular units of painted surface. The writing as writing invokes metaphorically the processes by which history is constructed—until recently leaving out women, people of color, groups whose relation to the hegemonic center of power rendered them invisible to the official version of political and social events. Schor's painting serves as an interrogation and questioning of the authoritative statements of entrenched patriarchal power—in all their linguistic linearity. The visual form of the rendered words returns them to their materiality as a context, place or site of formation, while also distorting them from any easily formulaic transparency for ready readability and consumption. The statements, thus curved, looped, filled, and haloed only transmit their message through the well-massaged medium of the painted image, refusing easy translation into a disembodied meaning. The presence of language as a body—as a physical, fleshy form, dripped with blood, milk, cum, other bodily fluids—is a subversion of the classic distinction between the symbolic order of the linguistic law and the sensual pleasures of the semiotic body. Language here is bodily, a somatic excrescence, squeezed from the breast, flowing from the penis, or borrowed from a unstaunched wound.

Schor's current esthetic concern is a fundamental critique of the structure of patriarchal power through representation. She has been working with representations of the penis—that organ of masculine identity which psychoana-

lysts like Jacques Lacan went to such extremes to differentiate from the symbolic form of the phallus. Schor returns these two to their inevitable relation to each other. If the phallus, as the sign of difference, marks those distinctions by which male individuals gain access to power, then the symbolic function is largely repeated by the function of the penis—which is used to identify those who have phallic power. By insistently and repeatedly redrawing the penis as such a sign of phallic power, Schor has managed to destabilize the distinction between these two, calling attention over and over to the masculine character of patriarchy. Patriarchy, for Schor, is not a generalized abstraction, but a very real and very much lived feature of contemporary society. *War Frieze* and *Area of Denial* are both saturated with references to recent military campaigns on the part of the United States. The aggression of the imperialist nation, she implies, is not to be separated from the masculinist identity of its patriarchal order. By making use of highly sensual painterly surfaces, ones which gratify the viewer through the range of technical manipulations, Schor manages to engage—even seduce—the eye into the critical issues of the work.

The phrase, "area of denial," came to Schor from military sources. The term is used technically to describe the space under an explosion of a bomb above ground which eliminates oxygen to the area below. This process achieves a suffocating destruction of all life in the zone while leaving property and structures unharmed. This is similar to the process of subjection of women in a patriarchal order whose structures function to eliminate possibilities for women. "So many things are an area of denial," Schor said in a recent interview, "the body, its contingency and mortality, and the body of painting itself."

Schor's first penis imagery paintings were produced in 1987, followed by the images of an ear, a breast, and then various mutations of these into relations with each other. The image of the penis speaking into the ear, coming into the ear, finding its own pleasured sexual release in an outpouring of stuff into the aperture of the Other as a form of domination as well as discourse, was a predominant motif of these earlier works. Schor's positions are not simplistic, binaristic or ideologically rigid—she sees and presents the paradoxical mutations and processes by which language as a form of power and exchange is transmitted from mother to child, from maternal to paternal figures, according to a complex dynamics of gendered authority and relations. But her more recent paintings attach these analyses to a wider realm of concerns—both sexual/political and art historical/theoretical.

As a contemporary theoretical artist, Schor is necessarily attentive to her position within his-

torical categorizations and positions. The long *War Frieze* is not only a work critiquing the general relation between phallocentric power and contemporary culture, but also between the masculinist terms of modernism and the more recent critical developments differentiating the current state of art from its antecedents. Modernism is literally flushed down the toilet, poured through the conduit of the phallic/penis form, run out as a liquid line of writing, as a term milked dry, a term squeezed from the organs and genitalia of an exhausted artistic milieu, only to find itself in the final embrace of cold porcelain—an ignoble if predictable termination. "It's modernism stupid," the work states, as if to reiterate for the nth time to some dull dim-wit still invested in the old terms that it is finished, done, and needs to be given up. The frustration, the insistence, the finality of the statement all intersect, and withal, are rendered in the slow, patient, careful touch of Schor's exquisite painterly technique.

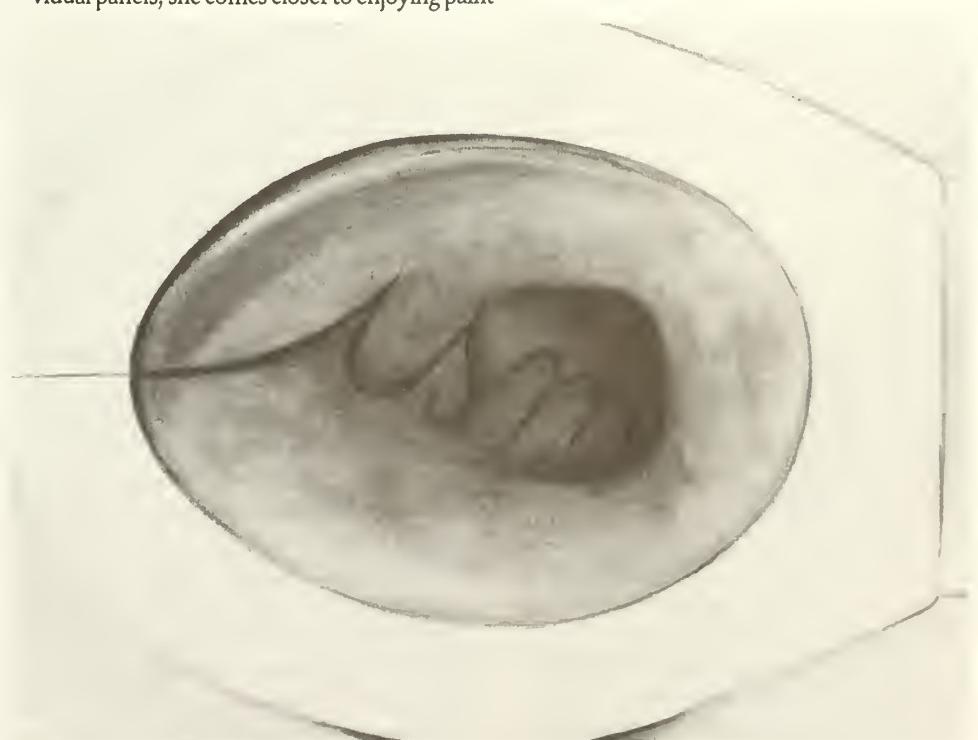
But if on the one hand Schor is clear about the need to reject the old tenets of modernism—especially its triumphant virility and abstract formalism—she is equally aware of her own ambivalent relation to the practice of modern art. As a painter she realizes, inevitably, that painting itself belongs to the traditions of modernism and that in confronting the received positions of that tradition she is still in her own way much involved in the modernist agenda with respect to painting.

Schor's love of painting, of the pure pleasure of the activity of putting pigment onto canvas in various degrees of opacity, thickness, transparency, and delicacy is rarely sufficient justification for her to paint. In several single, individual panels, she comes closer to enjoying paint

for paint's sake than in the large works where the same technical virtuosity is displayed, but in the context of a larger project. "Semicolon in Flesh" and "Breast" contain explicit body references. Red-lipped areas around the vaginal openings in "Semicolon" are surrounded with sensual skin tones and fine-lined pubic hair, but the actual opening is in the form of the punctuation mark, suggesting a strange conflict between the notion of language and sexuality, essential femininity and symbolic representation. "Spanish Painting" resonates with its title through the choice of rich color and lush paint, an echo of a tradition of excess in which emotional dramas of the spirit and the heart are played out through blood, tears, and religious ecstasy. Schor's seductive surface and painterly pleasure are given full reign here, but there are no explicit thematic references outside of material treatment and the tones of the palette.

Schor has referred to the process of painting as an "endless deferral of pleasure and closure." This is a feminine trope of the sexual pleasure of production, the pleasure of sexual production, the feminine erotics of a continual play—tactile, sensual, unbounded, here put at the service of a meaning which is critical, theoretical, linguistic, and yet embedded in the somatic physicality of paint. Schor very clearly states her own intentions when she says, "I think painting must operate at the intersection of the richness of its past and its materiality with the critique of painting, the challenge of the real." ■

**JOHANNA DRUCKER** teaches contemporary art and critical theory at Columbia University. Her new book, *Theorizing Modernism*, is available from Columbia University Press.



MIRA SCHOR, "ism," 1993, oil on linen, 12 x 16"

# STAGES OF DISCOVERY:

## Studio Visits with Four Artists

FRITZ BULTMAN  
"Cynthia Standing," 1982  
pencil on paper, 29 x 23"

by Sara London

ELLEN LeBOW, "Untitled," 1993  
Courtesy Rice/Polak Gallery

JENNIFER DITACCHIO, "BLUE," 1993  
encaustic on wood/copper frame, 19 x 18"  
Courtesy Hells Kitchen Gallery

DONNA FLAX, "Fine Dining at the Whitney," 1993  
oil on board, 6 x 6"  
Courtesy UFO Gallery

### Donna Flax

Two years ago Donna Flax experienced a fortuitous accident in her work. She'd left a small painting on the dashboard of her car in the middle of summer, and returned to find that the heavily-waxed medium had completely melted. The piece, a landscape labored over to a point of happy resolution, had become a faceless pudding. The transformation, however, inspired a wholly new process for the artist, who began to explore the fuller personality of wax.

Flax, 39, recounts this story in her clean, sparse studio above the Provincetown Post Office, where previously vacant rooms now provide workspace for some of the town's most talented young painters. Sitting in denim work overalls and surrounded by more than a dozen miniature paintings hung at eye-level across three white walls, she takes a palm-sized block of wood from her work table and runs a hand over its lumpy face. The sun-cooked wax, she explains of the dashboard fiasco, "had formed this fabulous surface that I really loved, so I brought it inside, it hardened up, and I painted over it." But now there was "history painted underneath, sealed over—it had so much depth."

Her new landscapes retain a sense of personal narrative, suggestive of human relationships. Diminutive in size, the paintings evoke expansive skies and plains. A path divides a small stand of trees on a stretch of flatland. A lone tree rises in isolation at the top of a rocky crest. A large sky hovers protectively over a short span of green. Flax renders nature in its purest forms, absent of figures, although an occasional house appears in some of her nocturnal paintings.

Human figures do appear in Flax's recent, New York City-inspired miniatures of restaurant interiors. Like her landscapes, these pieces capture a perspective of great distance. A fly on



a far wall near the ceiling would have the strangely stretched perspective we seem to have as we glimpse the formal rituals of tiny waiters and diners. The buzzing activity contrasts with the quietude of the landscapes, and the colors, too, are heightened. Discovering the idiosyncratic palette of Florine Stettheimer, who painted ensemble scenes and portraits of friends during the early part of the century, has reaffirmed Flax's commitment to bolder pigments. She has also been looking at the distinctive figurative works of Robert Greene and the abstract paintings of Jacqueline Humphries. But mostly she's been glimpsing life around her, observing the rituals in eating establishments and at dinner parties, and culling lush arcadian images from her travels through the byways of Upstate New York and Pennsylvania and the rolling Kentucky hills.

Process is where her passion resides, and beeswax has challenged her to find a sculptural balance, "the balance between rubbing it on and rubbing it off." When the wax is right, the painted image—"that grace and effort thing"—follows naturally.

### Cynthia Packard

For Cynthia Packard, process is all-consuming. A figure and still-life painter, she spends hours each day in a sprawling, 1000-square-foot former dance studio on Bradford Street in Provincetown. She works on as many as 10 paintings a day, "going back and back and back." Each painting represents months of struggle: "I can work on the same painting for a year, but the actual image that you see at the end may take a couple of hours."

Trained as a sculptor, Packard, 36, has an earthy sensibility revealed less by her elegant if rough-hewn images than by the language she chooses to describe her work. She refers to "ruin" and "artifact" and "layering" in a painted canvas. "It's really physical process for me—putting the paint on, taking it off." In addition to brushes, she uses palette knives, rags, rollers, and her bare hands. A richness of pigment in the large oil paintings, stacked and hung around the mirrored walls, seems to blossom from seasons of application. Surfaces are scratchy and worked. Roughly-textured dark lines insistently delineate forms, like old border-fences marking out the boundaries of resilient acreage. Reclining, faceless female nudes become hills and valleys of mood.

Drawing is one of Packard's strengths, and though she is trying to absent drawing from her work, it has provided her with a certain confidence. She is basically self-taught as a painter, but credits the late Fritz Bultman as her drawing instructor. Her first lessons were from the perspective of a model as she posed in Bultman's studio. There she would watch him drawing in the reflection of his windows. "I would listen to him and get up during breaks and see what he drew, and to this day, every day, I think about him." For three years Packard posed for the elder artist. "One day he turned to me and said, 'We're going to draw together.'" The two drew together for the next five years twice a week—



CYNTHIA PACKARD, "Untitled," oil on canvas  
Courtesy Packard Gallery

"an invaluable experience."

The great-granddaughter of Max Bohm and the daughter of Anne Packard, both accomplished painters, Cynthia Packard is accustomed to the sacrifices in an artist's life. She is the mother of three young boys and teaches karate (she's a black belt) to help support her family. Her discipline extends directly into her painting. "This is my world," she says, gesturing at the ample work around her. Away from the "male energy" of her household, this is where her painted world of relaxing, reclining women emerges. "It's my only sanity," she adds. "Of course, it's my insanity at the same time."

### Jennifer Ditacchio

Jennifer Ditacchio likes looking beyond—beyond windows, through tunnels, between buildings, across bridges. Her eye discards the detail of surface, the minutia of realism, and instead explores form, light, gesture, and mood—the imposing silhouette of a city high-rise against a cloud-scrubbed sky or the commanding crosses of telephone poles stitching together a bruised Cape Cod afternoon. Painting with oil on canvas or encaustic on wood, Ditacchio transforms what she sees into haunting abstractions that express intensity of mood, and a somber, revelatory vision.

She describes her work as "a collective memory" of the places she's been. "I go into the painting and it's almost like I'm walking around in this unknown place, and I wait for it to come

with her companion, painter Michael Landis. Here, among tubes of pigments, brushes and pots for heating wax, she is working on several paintings simultaneously. While painting is Ditacchio's passion, at age 24 she is also an accomplished printmaker. Her monoprints, linoleum-block prints and etchings, like her paintings, show abstracted figurative images, but the medium results in a precision that contrasts sharply with the thickly-painted canvases. These small works on paper are elegant impressions of houses and telephone poles. Their mood is surprisingly serene.

Ditacchio remarks that much of her drawing has a delicate, sparse character. She takes small pads with her wherever she travels, and sketches religiously. The daughter of Provincetown painter Linda van de Visse, she remembers going to life-drawing classes as a young girl with her mother, and studying the figure for many years afterwards. As early as high school, and later in college, she painted in full color from life. "I was really bent on making it look real," she says of her former work, until one day she realized "there's really not a lot of soul in there." As she stood with her easel in a train yard, she had a revelation: "I realized what I was going for was the silhouette of the train against the station." Shapes and light would inform her subsequent work.

What fascinated Ditacchio when she moved back to Cape Cod after college was the "uniqueness of the light at the edge of morning or at the edge of night. That in-between time." The stark forms of the piers began to influence her. And while forms inspired her paintings, a quality of mood infused them with something more complex, the result, she believes, of "a lot of longing—searching and longing."

### Ellen LeBow

"I'm always cutting things," says Ellen LeBow, sitting down at a table in her large rustic Dorchester studio. A skull from a Port-au-Prince cemetery sits on a nearby shelf and across the room "Ricky" the parrot maintains a quiet vigilance. Leaning against a cluttered wall are detailed figurative stencil paintings, products of her constant cutting. These include black-on-white images that draw from Japanese and Thai narrative art traditions, and small colorful works on wood, consisting of at least 20 separate stencils, which have the lively simplicity of Caribbean folk art. Much of LeBow's inspiration comes from her travels in Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and especially Haiti. Her subjects range from bulls and wild horses to a man and woman entwined in a dance, and a guitarist sitting on a wall in meditation. She values Thai art, she says, for its "quality of purpose even in a chaotic scene," and in her stencils there is evidence of a similar integrity.

Drawing is at the core of LeBow's process.



Her easy line is evident in a large contour oil stick drawing (she sometimes uses mango bark stain) of a young Jamaican boy, his weight shifted nonchalantly to one leg in a pose reminiscent of classical sculpture. When LeBow is not drawing or cutting, she is rubbing. She engraves her own plaster panels with original compositions—an idea inspired by grave rubbings and old stone markers in Cape Cod cemeteries—and then rubs the images with black crayon onto Japanese tableau paper, shifting the paper around to compose different images. "That's the exciting part for me—getting the rhythms of images repeating themselves." One work shows echoed images of a woman kneeling in prayer. A queue of identical angels crouch in another. There is also a portrait of Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide, as well as numerous icons, or milagro-like ghost images: a uterus, a lung, birds, hands, and trees. Themes of birth, death, healing, and flight are repeated in these works. In some of the rubbings there are references to Christian mythology. Phrases such as "hora fugit," found on gravestones, surround some of the images, and a broken willow is framed by the words, "Thy fairest prospects vanish here."

LeBow says that she chooses to work in black and white in order "to reduce things to their symbols, to distill things down." By controlling the tones in her rubbings, she hopes for "a mix of delicacy and an absoluteness of form." What is most striking in these phantom prints is her ability to evoke a textured depth and a resonant spirituality despite the flatness of the medium.

Lately she has been learning to emboss. "I love low relief," she says as she demonstrates the technique by inscribing a piece of paper with a special round-ended metal burnisher. She flips the paper over and holds it so the light catches the contours of a woman's body that has emerged from tiny trailing berms. "It's just light and shadow," she says enthusiastically. "It's my first step toward sculpture." ■

SARA LONDON is a poet and journalist living in Provincetown.



to me, and I'll remember, this reminds me of that bridge in Italy." Another reminds her of driving in and out of New York City, and another of a train station in Vermont. Specifics, though, are unimportant to Ditacchio, who feels her canvases are more about "the moods I've been in when I've been in those places."

Her moods, she notes, can easily be dictated by her progress in the studio—a cramped cellar room down a narrow alley on Provincetown's busy Commercial Street. Large and small canvases crowd the low-ceilinged space she shares

# LOIS GRIFFEL and the Cape Cod School of Art

by Christopher Busa

Lois Griffel is an artist who, as director of the Cape Cod School of Art, carries the torch of impressionist painting inherited from the school's previous directors, Charles Hawthorne and Henry Hensche. She is also the author of a new book of technique and color theory, based on but extending the teachings of her predecessors, *Painting the Impressionist Landscape: Lessons in Interpreting Light and Color*, published by Watson-Guptill in May. Although Hawthorne never published a book about his teaching, his students collected his statements from their notebooks and a book, *Hawthorne on Painting*, appeared in 1938 and a new edition in 1960 (Dover). Henry Hensche published a volume of lifelong reflections in 1988, near the end of his life, *The Art of Seeing and Painting*. Hawthorne's book has the charm of direct speech bound with the subtle authority of an artist who can demonstrate what he verbalizes. He urged his students, "Think of your work as the portrait of a day, rather than of a model. Look only for the spots of color and establish them and they will be trees, background, flesh." Hensche's book, by contrast, is wildly uneven, mixing valuable observations with absurd generalizations. He writes, "Modemist painting is actually anarchy in the field of visual expression. It has taken man 60 centuries to get order in the picture and in this half century every effort has been made to destroy it. Each practitioner makes his own rules, writes his own dictionary, and anyone who says he does not understand is considered a hopeless idiot. The modernists and most of the so-called realists have invented their color schemes, unrelated to nature and adding nothing to man's enjoyment of himself."

The impressionist technique Hawthorne developed and which inspired such passionate allegiance was based on the idea of painting, not things, but the effect of light on things, on the observation of atmospheric conditions on objects, with the range of colors determined by the color keys of nature. "For instance," Hensche writes, "a foggy day as Monet painted it was expressed with colors very high in key; in contrast, a sunny day would be represented by lights and darks opposing each other. When there is a monotony of the same color key appearing in a painter's work as well as the same colors, no matter how varied the subject matter, it means that person has never understood the new painting era started by the impressionists and put into teaching form by Charles Hawthorne. It was a revolutionary

way of teaching color development and will open up an era of fine realist painting in the future. So much undue stress is put upon originality as though nothing else equalled it in importance. Babies are not original, but each generation treasures them nevertheless, and is happy with a tiny variation of themselves."

Hawthorne founded the Cape Cod School of Art in 1899 when he was 28 years old and had himself been an assistant of William Merit Chase near Southampton on Long Island. Hawthorne was attracted to the light in Provincetown, as he had been to the light on the South Fork of Long Island, because each atmosphere was so similar to France, where the impressionist movement originated. The school flourished, attracting hundreds of students for 30 summers, spawning competing schools, and fostering Provincetown's reputation as a place for artists. Following Hawthorne's death in 1930, Hensche, who had studied with Hawthorne for eight years, continued the school for 55 more years until 1985 when he sold the Pearl Street property to Griffel with the understanding that she would carry on the tradition. When I went to visit her last summer, a movie, being made about a young painter's struggle to find his direction—*Unconditional Love*, loosely based on the Cape Cod School of Art—had just concluded the day's filming in the barn-like classroom building, which contained all the props such a movie might need, including stacks of gessoed masonite and paintings in progress, on easels and walls, their promise gleaming in the wet paint.

Through a tall hedge that shelters the yard of the school and across a little-used road is the house which Griffel shares with her husband, an experienced stage actor who is playing a minor lead in *Unconditional Love*, his first feature film. The artist and I sat down in aging, over-stuffed chairs to talk. A native New Yorker, she found out about Provincetown quite by accident. Taking a year off from public school teaching in 1971 to take classes in portrait painting at the Art Students League in New York, where she studied with Everett Raymond Kinstler and Harvey Dinnerstein, she was told, "You've come to the right place if you want to learn about painting. But if you want to learn about color, go to Provincetown." That winter Griffel visited Provincetown and met Henry Hensche privately at his home. "I couldn't believe that anyone was doing the color that I saw in his paintings," she said. "To me, Henry was Monet—alive and teaching—and I fell in love with Provincetown at the same time. I immediately planned to spend the summer

here, and I never left."

For 10 years, when Provincetown was more intimate and the impromptu street sketch was a summer tourist attraction, Griffel made a living on the street with a group of roughly 40 artists, including Howie Schneider, Frank Milby, Marcus Smith, Jim Green, and Simie Maryles, who produced portraits from 11 in the morning until 11 at night, seven days a week for three solid months. Her portrait business thriving, Griffel had the freedom to leave public school teaching and to concentrate on painting during the winter. But during the hectic summers, many of the artists who were also Hensche's students, including Griffel, would study at the school in the early light, from seven until they went to their various portrait shops for their furious 12-hour shifts. "We were out of our minds," she admitted. Working that hard, putting in those excessively long hours, finally took their toll and she developed asthma from the pastel dust in the portrait studio. In 1981, with her husband's encouragement, she left the portrait business and started waitressing. A few years after that she was able to quit waitressing and devote herself full-time to painting.

Hensche's Friday morning demonstrations, where he taught by example, were filled with students watching every stroke, but he usually reserved specific criticism of work for advanced students, especially men. Griffel remembers, "On one of my first days in the yard, it became obvious to me that I wouldn't be able to compete for Henry's attention when a young girl walked into the yard with a box of homemade cookies for him. I knew I would have to blaze my own path and find things out for myself. My first 10 years in Provincetown, I didn't study with Henry as much as study peripherally—picking up things from my peers. A lot of them are embittered because Henry, when threatened by being usurped, pushed his advanced students out of the fold. Many were turned off by his tirades. I remember a woman walking out of the schoolyard crying. It is interesting that many young artists didn't see this as an advantage or a compliment, which indirectly, it was. However, it taught me to be independent and self-directed."

Griffel was able to improve her portraits by watching many of the artists on the street. Local artists Jim Green and Marcus Smith became her mentors in the portrait studio, while other portrait colleagues, such as Clay Buchanan and Tom Moore, her companions in the early-morning schoolyard, shared their color expertise with her. "I was able to make myself learn—despite those limitations—because I had great friends and mentors. I was unrelenting, asking endless ques-

**Color and light is the subject of our paintings. But what painting is, is poetry. This is about being poetic. Some people do it with words. We do it with paint.**

tions of my peers while learning from experience. My paintings improved very fast and I started to catch up and overtake people who had been studying with Henry for a very long time."

This may have been the impetus that made her develop as a teacher, since she feels, "By determining to learn what Henry was teaching without direct communication with him has made me a better teacher. I didn't get stuck in the schoolyard because I knew I had to do it by myself. This is what challenged me to make color/light theory less intimidating for my own students."

Griffel was already an experienced high-school teacher who knew she loved sharing with people. As she advanced, students in the schoolyard would ask her for advice. One winter she decided to teach a color class at the Art Association. "I guess I was effective, because the following year the class tripled and quite a few people asked me to give them private lessons. Two of those people began studying with Henry the following summer. Henry realized that he had never met them, and he was impressed with their level of painting and understanding of the color theory. When he asked them where they had learned color, they told him." She says with a smile, "The greatest compliment

I ever received from Henry happened at that moment. He turned to me and said with one of his sly grins, 'well, I guess you know what you're doing.' From then on, he let me help the students in the yard, which was a first. He had never allowed anyone to actually teach before that. When I took the school over in 1986, Henry started sharing a great deal of his knowledge with me."

An incident left Griffel with a cause. A friend who had been studying with Hensche for years mentioned that she would be devastated if she could not purchase a particular blue color that she had come to rely on. Griffel asked her why she didn't mix it from scratch, and she had no idea how to do it. Griffel was appalled that she was blindly painting without any real information about color mixing. This gave her the idea for her own book. "I was angry when I saw how needlessly difficult it was to learn the color theory and I knew that I had to elaborate on Henry's way of teaching. Henry made it appear there was only a right or wrong way. His flaw was not allowing individual creative expression, and he had a limited belief in the value of learning how to draw. He believed that the proper use of color would teach people how to draw, and that all the fundamentals of good painting would follow. But I was witness to the struggle of those who didn't have a solid drawing foundation."

Just as Hawthorne posed his models on the beach in strong sunlight with a parasol obscuring

the face in dark shadow, obliging students to paint the mass of the face and not its details, Hensche's use of blocks painted with simple strong colors allows students to concentrate on large masses and provides a way into the more complex problems of landscape and portraits. Griffel designed her book as a series of teaching progressions unfolding, step by step, the impressionist point of view. She emphasizes that the way to create volume is to add to the mass and she developed her own color charts. The book also makes reference to the interactive attributes of color as studied in great depth by Josef Albers,



who discovered that any color can be made to shine like sunlight or glow like mist depending on the field of color surrounding it.

One of the most important aspects of the Cape Cod School of Art is that it offers the simple luxury of plein-air painting in the radiant plein air of Cape Cod. Colors can appear uncanny in this atmosphere, and straw-colored plumes of pampas grass and silvery-brown shrubs can be transformed into moments of grace. Although Hensche's dogmatism alienated him from much of the art community, students were continually drawn to him, inspired by his unwavering dedication to the impressionist ideal, which was less a method of painting than a way of seeing itself. In response to criticism that painting fences of roses might be out of touch—anachronistic—Griffel answers, "Painting like this isn't only about painting pretty pictures. I see this as a contribution to society. George Bernard Shaw said that, without art, reality would be too harsh to be bearable. Monet gave us the fundamentals of seeing color and light, but the principles of impressionism are eternal. Artists from all over the world are dedicated to the plein-air approach to light and color. And because of the Cape Cod School of Art almost every gallery on Cape Cod has at least one artist who is a former student of Henry Hensche or Lois Griffel."

Griffel is very appreciative of the artists who studied with Hensche and herself, and who generously endorsed the book by donating their paintings for reproduction: Jim Beatrice, Lee

Boynton, Gail Browne, Heather Bruce, John DiMestico, Cedric B. Egeli, Joannette H. Egeli, Dulah Evans, Fredric Goldstein, Peter Guest, Glenna Hartwell, Robert Longley, Margaret E. McWerthy, Rosalie Nadeau, Dan Neidhardt, Hilda Neily, E. Principato, Terry Rockwood, Michael Rogovsky, Lorraine Trenholm, Peter Weber, and Carol Westcott.

The book was so-named because impressionism has never stopped being vital, but an artist doesn't necessarily have to be an "impressionist" to use the book. The color foundation can be used in any way, in any medium. Griffel has a dream where new students show up in the yard with the book under their arm, ready to study with her where the book has ended.

"Color and light," she says, "is the subject of our paintings. But what painting is, is poetry. This is about being poetic. Some people do it with words. We do it with paint."

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is editor of *Provincetown Arts*.

LOIS GRIFFEL, "My Favorite Rose Garden" oil on canvas, 16 x 20" Courtesy of Rice/Polak Gallery

Below: LOIS GRIFFEL



## The Power of Place:

by Daniel Ranalli

Through the dark tunnel of this past interminable Northeast winter, there were few experiences to illuminate the night and draw warmth to the soul. One exception was the exhibition at the Boston University Art Gallery in January, which sought to take measure of the influence of Hans Hofmann on former students Jim Forsberg, Paul Resika, Judith Rothschild, Myron Stout and Tony Vevers. Hofmann, nearly 30 years after his death, remains a paradox. Revered as a guide and teacher of the first magnitude, he remains insecure in the pantheon of post-war American modernism because his work sometimes fails to live up to its own elevated objectives. Art history frequently does not know quite what to do with artists whose ideologies seem to transcend their objects. Conversely, it can also be every bit as mistrustful of artists whose objects are not wrapped carefully in a tightly woven shroud of theory. Writing and theorizing often puts an artist in the unenviable position of having to live up to a set of verbally articulated ideals that are, *ipso facto*, just out of reach. Theory only needs words to give it shape, whereas the artist must embody idea with practice.

Hofmann balanced a life of teaching and writing with the daily act of painting and of living, and that sense of commitment to a life in art may be his most important contribution. Building on the color theories of Goethe as well as Cezanne, his catechism of modernist pictorial flatness drew acolytes to him, including the critic Clement Greenberg as well as a number of first- and second-generation abstract expressionists. Hofmann knew that art was a way of experiencing a sensate world, but he sought to give it a theoretical vessel to both contain it and pour it from. Absorbing German tenets of consciousness and American Transcendentalism's acceptance of the intuitive, Hofmann, it must be said, talked a great painting, but struggled to make one.

Moving through this exhibition, one is confronted almost immediately with the question of whether the power of place may not be more important to each artist in the show than any ideology encoded by a teacher. Indeed, the taproot of Hofmann's theoretical tree was his belief that all artistic inspiration must spring from nature's processes, and it is clear that for each artist Provincetown is a poetic and profound embodiment of nature.



## THE WORK OF HANS HOFMANN AND HIS STUDENTS

Mary Drach McInnes's exhibition and fine catalogue essay provide an important opportunity to look squarely at Hofmann's principles in the context of his paintings and those of several of his most accomplished students, although an exhibition of two or three times this size would have illuminated the issue more clearly. The essay itself begins with an epigraph from

Hofmann which may reveal the source of the muse which the Provincetown artists hold in common:

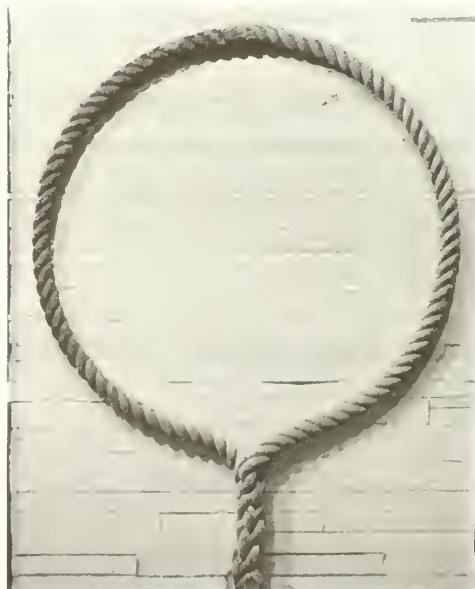
*My summer will soon end. I hate to leave painting. I had trouble painting the landscape when I worked everyday. What Heaven! What Nature!*

Hofmann's summer's end means goodbye to Provincetown, and a return to the city. Those of us who have been here, and must leave, know the lamentation. The Outer Cape's profound visceral and visual qualities can reduce theories to ashes. To be here is to be alive, and leaving is always a kind of loss of living. The adhesive which seems to hold the work of these artists together is not a theoretical bond imparted by a teacher, so much as a gestalt about living and making art, which Provincetown and the Outer Cape nurture with magnanimity. Hofmann and his successors hold, first and foremost, to a profound sense of place which includes the

viction that the artist must begin with nature and coax the process of making art from the conscious as well as the subconscious.

Hofmann's concept of "push/pull," whereby certain colors advance or recede in the picture plane, became an important tool in the modernist rejection of illusionistic pictorial space, and the Greenbergian doctrine of acceptance (indeed, near worship) of the canvas's flatness fits nicely on its footings. However, in this show I see also the push/pull of tides and the atmospheric light of summer oxygenating the painting. In Hofmann's own work there is the constant hum of an electric energy of life. It is a motility of give and take between art and life as much as any formalist push/pull. In both early works such as Untitled ("House on the Hill"), 1935, and later works, such as "Sun in the Foliage," 1964, the artist seems animated by a life force which is constantly reactivated by experience, both small and large, of daily living, and which seems more rarified and intensified on this tiny curl of land/sea/sky. Hofmann is also an important link to the European traditions of painting, providing a syntax for the language of formalism and validating the very act of making art the epicenter of one's life.

Hofmann speaks of color creating intervals of harmony, with frequent comparisons to musical harmony. Resika's masterful use of color and gesture manifests itself as almost a glimpse, held as an afterimage behind the eye. For Resika, the light of morning and twilight offers profound insights into the nature of seeing. Forsberg reprises Hofmann's notion of color as architecture by reaching into the subconscious for a formalism built with a mixture of spiritualism and dream imagery informed by nature. Gulls ambiguous enough to be whale tails float in bay/seas/skies that drip in a watery dialogue with the grid. Myron Stout, represented here largely by a monochromatic vision of balance and harmony, invokes the horizon line as a mantra, as convincingly as any of Hofmann's theories.



TONY VEVERS, "Tides II," 1992  
rope, canvas, sand, acrylic, 58 x 45"  
Photo: Jim Zimmerman



PAUL RESIKA, "Canale, Provincetown," 1988-91  
oil on canvas, 48 x 60"  
Collection of Carol and Howard Hillman

Moving through this exhibition, one is confronted almost immediately with the question of whether the power of place may not be more important to each artist in the show than any ideology encoded by a teacher.

Hofmann realized early that making art is a way of life, not a career, and he kept the dialogue of theory and sensation in continuous play. The optic nerve struggles with synapses in the cerebellum, and the heart tries to get in a murmur where it can. Tony Vevers' rope and sand collages bring the physicality of the cycles of time and the soft envelope of the beach forward as both real and imagined landscapes of the mind. Vevers' braided ropes weave time and place into harmonies that recall the circularity of tide and season. Judith Rothschild summons mythic tales of the mysteries of the sea and the sky that reaches down to touch it, abstracting the organic shapes of vegetation to endow her formal structure with a fluid grace.

As I write, cold snow blows outside my window, but I know there is a summer. A summer of warmth, of light shining through my eyes and deep into my heart warming me with its knowing. And like every artist who lives here, for a month, a season, or a lifetime, and each of those in this exhibition, we pray we are worthy enough to integrate its meaning into the life we live and the marks we make in the short interval we are here. ■

**DANIEL RANALLI** is an artist and writer who lives in Wellfleet and Boston. He exhibits in Provincetown at the DNA Gallery.



MYRON STOUT, "Untitled," 1992  
graphite on paper, 11 x 13 3/4"  
Museum of Modern Art, NY



facing page.  
HANS HOFMANN, "House on the Hill," 1935  
ink on paper, 8 1/2 x 11"

HANS HOFMANN, "Sun in the Foliage," 1964  
oil on canvas, 84 x 72"  
Graham Gund, Cambridge, MA

# Edward Albee Foundation at Montauk

by Jennifer Cross

**F**or the past 28 years, a unique artists' colony has existed in the woods of Montauk on the eastern tip of Long Island, founded by the noted playwright Edward Albee. There, a great white barn with gables and a gambrel roof provides living and working space for about 26 artists and writers each summer. The barn and a nearby cottage are officially known as the William Flanagan Memorial Creative Persons's Center, named after a composer and friend of Albee's who died. They were originally built as a stable and a kennel by visionary developer, Carl Fisher, the man who developed Miami Beach and whose similar designs for Montauk were halted by bankruptcy. Vacant and unimproved when Albee purchased them, the buildings were made habitable by constructing bedrooms, studios, and kitchens. Each summer from June through September four writers and two visual artists come in shifts for one-month residencies in the barn. Since 1979 artists Rex Lau and Diane Mayo have been in residence year-round in the small cottage. They keep an eye on things and help to orient new arrivals.

Albee's motivation for founding the colony was a desire to meet the critical needs of struggling artists by providing them with the time and freedom to work. "After *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, it occurred to me to do something useful with the money rather than give it to the government," he explained. Never having worked in a colony himself, Albee recalled visiting friends at Yaddo and MacDowell and observing that the writers and artists there were already well established with their careers. He started the Edward F. Albee Foundation and began the residency program as a means of giving work opportunities to artists still in their formative years. "We wanted to take a chance on people," he said in a recent interview. Though some have been in their 60s, even 70s, most residents are between the ages of 25 and 40.

Hundreds of applications are received each year, and Albee makes the final selections with the help of a rotating advisory board. Poets, playwrights, novelists, and curators have been invited to come, as well as painters, sculptors, and other visual artists. The playwright's interest in the visual arts is long-standing. He has collected art for years and has curated a number of exhibitions, including "Edward Albee's Eye" at the Hillwood Art Museum on Long Island and a



"THE BARN"

facing page  
EDWARD ALBEE

selection of past residents at the Foundation for an exhibition at the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton.

Described by its founder as spartan, the program is without the frills and comforts of some of the other residences. Past residents, however, some of whom have returned two or three times, sing its praises as a focused environment in which to produce work. "At Albee's," says former resident Donna de Salvo, "it's all about the creative process."

For many, the invitation to come occurred at a critical time in their artistic development. "I was working at zillion little part-time jobs," says painter Katherine Bowling. "Being invited gave validation to my work." The mutual respect and support she received from the others in the group furthered that validation and the opportunity to concentrate full-time on her art without distraction allowed Bowling to reach a new stage of development in her painting. Later that fall she had a solo show at the Rosa Esman Gallery in New York and she is now represented by the Blum Helman Gallery in New York.

Carol Hepper, a sculptor who has been at the Foundation twice, appreciated the intimacy of the experience. She has been at the larger colonies where one is pampered with hand-delivered lunches and separate cabins. At Albee's, meals are communal, and the close quarters can generate bonding as well as tensions. In Hepper's case, she formed lasting friendships, particularly with Bowling who was there during Hepper's first stay in 1986. "I have fond memories," she says, characterizing her stay as "extremely productive and focused." A bonus for Hepper was access to Montauk's fishing docks, where she was able to collect fish skins, the material she was working in at the time.

Donna De Salvo was an adjunct curator at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University when she came to the colony in 1988 to work on a catalogue essay for an exhibition she was organizing on Warhol's early work. She describes the barn as a haven, and her time spent there as "occurring at a special moment in my life where I was lucky enough to be immersed in a warm and supportive environment." She describes informal readings and painting critiques after dinner. One evening she gave a small lecture on Warhol's work. A group dynamic developed, she says, a feeling of commitment to those on the "inside" compared to those on the "outside." De Salvo found it jarring to have to leave one day to go to New York for research, and remembers being warmly welcomed back into the fold after her late night return by Long Island Railroad.

Traditionally the residents prepare a dinner for Albee at the end of their stay. De Salvo remembers theirs as "magical—every empty jar we could find in the place was filled with a white candle, wild flowers were gathered, and we had a fabulous feast." Conversation with Albee continued late into the night. She also recalled the night the group went to the ocean to witness a storm, everyone becoming aesthetically moved by this particular mood of nature.

As one might expect, within the intense four weeks of a residency with six people sharing one roof, all manner of human interactions have developed. Two romances have led to marriages. Mike Conley and Jane Finch met at the colony in the early '80s and later married. Kent Schell and Miriam Zydnor, residents in 1985, had a baby this year. Friction and clashes of egos have occurred as well. Rex Lau recalls at least one fist fight, and Hepper mentioned the challenge of negotiating within the shared spaces. Jon Fraser, a playwright who spent time at the

colony in 1983, has a lingering memory of the noxious fumes which emanated from a studio of one of the visual artists whose material of choice that summer was tar. Still, he describes the opportunity as "invaluable and highly productive." Coincidentally, both Mr. Fraser and Ms. De Salvo now live in the region. Fraser, whose latest play, *Black Forest*, was produced this spring at the Phoenix Ensemble Theater in New York, teaches theater at Southampton College where he is chairman of the department. De Salvo is currently the Roger Lehman curator at the nearby Parrish Art Museum.

In taking chances on unestablished artists, Albee's instincts have proven on target. Michael David, currently represented by the Knoedler Gallery in New York, was 27 when he came to Montauk. It was, he says, the first time he was able to be "just an artist," spend time with people like Albee and Elaine de Kooning, and take a memorable late-night ride in a convertible to visit the gravesite of Jackson Pollock in nearby East Hampton. Spalding Gray has been at the colony twice, the first time prior to *Swimming to Cambodia*, before he had achieved the recognition

bars. "New residents," Kelley says, soon discover that Montauk "is not the culture capital of the world" and that the colony, rustic, without rules or pretensions, "is what you make it. I'm an anarchist, and the Albee Foundation is anarchy run rampant."

After an initial welcoming from Rex and Diane, residents are on their own. There are rarely problems, Lau says, though he did tell of the time a conceptual artist was surrounded by police and taken in to the station for questioning. This artist, who Lau describes as very gentle, was making art that involved ritualistic symbols. He nailed drawings of eyeballs onto trees in the woods surrounding the barn and apparently ventured onto a neighbor's property. The grandchildren of the neighbor encountered one of these site-specific works, and by the time the story got to the police, real eyeballs were being nailed to trees, the work of a satanic cult. The artist, who was surrounded by squad cars on his bicycle coming back from market, was eventually released after, he says, he explained his theory of "entropic decay" to them.

Beyond the traditional dinner, Albee's interaction with the residents is low-key and minimal. Lau tells the story of one resident who noticed mail was delivered regularly into the barn by a man not in postal uniform. She attributed that to the casualness of country ways, but became perplexed when she noticed he didn't take her outgoing mail. "Why aren't you taking my letters?" she asked on the third day. "Well, I suppose I could," he replied. "Well, aren't you the mailman?" she asked. "No, I'm Edward Albee," he said. The woman required a few days to recover from her embarrassment.

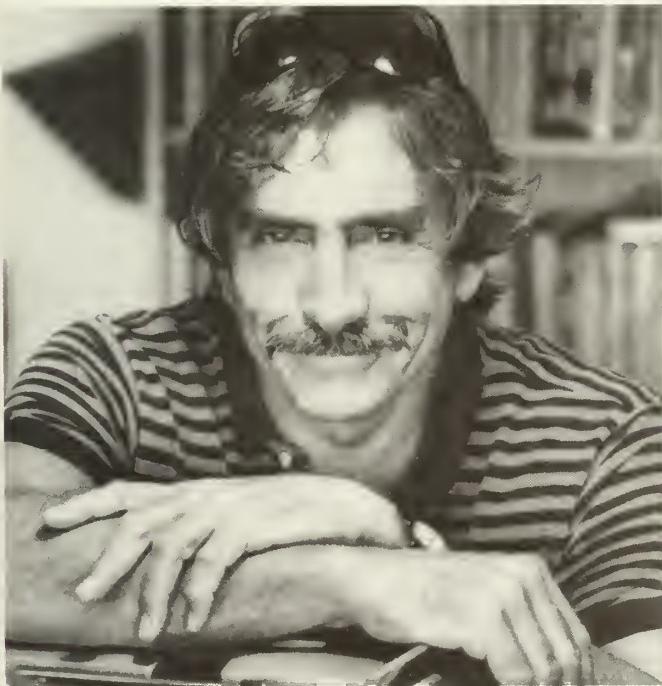
Albee rarely spends time at the barn beyond dropping by with the mail but, according to Guy Garcia, a writer who stayed there in 1992, his aura is everywhere. "He may be elusive in body, but his spirit pervades the property." For Garcia, who had been a staff writer at the *New York Times* for over a decade, the stay at Albee's came sometime after he had left his full-time job to pursue writing novels. At the Foundation he wrote a short story and worked on parts of his second novel *Obsidian Sky*, published this year by Simon and Schuster.

The application to the Foundation makes a special point of letting qualified artists who are HIV-positive or with AIDS know they are welcome. Robert Farber, an artist whose powerful

installation "I Thought I had Time" at Artists Space in New York drew parallels between AIDS and the Black Death, was a recent resident. Farber found the stay a retreat from the assault of living in New York. Though he admitted that the accommodations were a bit rough, he described his month there as idyllic. "My studio had what seemed like 40-foot-high ceilings, with huge barn doors open to the woods. It was pure luxury simply to have the time to think and to give the paintings a chance to breathe."

Little has changed since the Foundation began. Its function remains pure—a place for serious work. Writers may bring lap-top computers instead of manual typewriters these days, and residents, Lau observes, are more toned-down than in previous years. Albee has just been awarded his third Pulitzer for *Three Tall Women* and he continues to teach playwriting to a group of hand-picked students at the University of Texas. His contribution to the American theater has made him a legendary figure, but it is through his generosity in helping nurture the talent of others that he is making a contribution of a different kind, a personal difference in the lives of creative people, one by one. ■

JENNIFER CROSS is an artist who lives in East Hampton. She writes reviews for the *Southampton Press*.



he now enjoys. Others who have gone on to achieve distinction include sculptor John Duff, painter Sean Scully, playwright Albert Innaurato, non-fiction writer Olive Hershey, and novelist Carole Maso.

Painter Scott Kelly, who worked as Julian Schnabel's assistant for seven years, was familiar with Montauk and the Foundation when he came in the summer of 1992. (Schnabel has a house in Montauk). Kelly appreciates the uniqueness of Montauk, though he said other residents, especially those coming from Europe, don't know quite what to make of it at first. Montauk's beauty is astonishing, but the town is an odd mixture of garish tourist shops, strings of motels, reclusive wealthy people, no-nonsense locals, traditional fishermen, and hard-drinking



YEAR-ROUND RESIDENT REX LAU AT WORK IN HIS STUDIO

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# C O P I G R A P H Y

by Monique Brunet-Weinmann

The exhibition "Copigraphic Connections," shown in Hull and in Montreal early this year and in Rochester last summer as part of "Montage 93," a mammoth international exhibition of new imaging, had its origin in an exhibition in 1987 in Montreal called "Medium: Photocopy." Two dozen artists from Canada and Germany produced works which had in common two things: they were made by using a copier and they were unique pieces. The curator, Georg Muhleck, wrote in the trilingual book that served as a catalogue: "Although the concept of 'copy' is still connected with its instrument, the copier, we are nevertheless seeing an original which ranks as a drawing, monotype, or painting." In my own essay for the catalogue, I proposed the term "copigraph" for a work produced with the copier. The main critical issue then focused on the contradiction between the terms "copy" and "original," "reproduction" and "production," with a consequence of questioning the distinctions between copy, original, and fake that are so strictly defined by art history and the art market.

On opening night of "Medium: Photocopy" the Sharp CX 5000 machine which the Centre Copie-Art in Montreal had just acquired made a spectacular, hour-and-a-half performance. The cover of the photocopying machine had been removed and no original document had been inserted. But 66 different color images, memorized on the tape of the digital printer, began printing with the push of a button. "We were therefore producing copies without a master," Muhleck wrote, "and the memory replaced originality as a subject of investigation for the artist." This is a description of the already out-of-date status of Copy Art. Copigraphy, the new term, consists of producing an original work from various materials, which are not always existing printed or electronic images, by means of a copying machine. The materials may be as immaterial as light or ambient air.

With these new copiers, the notion of what is "original" must be completely rethought. "Today," as one of the artists, Daniel Cabanis, put it, "it is the ability to copy that gives rise to the original and not the reverse." Copigraphy is

obliged to become part of an enlarged context in which computer-driven printing systems allow artists to reproduce digital images on paper, canvas, or slides, from a computerized model, theoretically immaterial and indefinitely modifiable. The copying machine may be the sole instrument in the creative process or it may

"Computers are dissolving the boundaries between painting, photography, video, and sculpture." To this list must also be added copigraphy, which started this dissolving effect.

After a period of isolated pioneering in the '70s, the Copy Art movement, with the aim of finding a common voice, underwent a decade of regrouping into more or less structured artists' centers that formed an international network operating on the fringes of the official art world. The current decade has seen the increasing institutionalization of copigraphy and its high-tech computerized relatives—an inevitable result of the success of earlier creations. This integration has both positive and negative sides.



become part of a media chain that includes video, photography, or infography. As the French artist, Jean Mathiaut, said: "New processes, whether by thermo transfer, ink jet, sublimation, or bubble transfer, regularly form part of a graphic chain which tends to become computerized." Copying machines, able to print directly an image originating from a computer, video source, camera, or VCR, are said to be "connected."

Other terms such as electrography or datagraphy have been proposed. Just as future generations will view photography as the prehistory of another technological art, so this semantic questioning of copographers resembles the exercise by photographers. Peter Campus, who was a pioneer of video art in the '60s, argues that the new processes are hard to categorize. "We get wonderful things" using computer technology, he says, "but they are not photographs. There isn't really even a name for them yet—people call them digital photographs or computer-manipulated images." Kathleen Ruiz, a New York-based artist who reworks photomicrographs on a computer and then prints the resulting images onto various materials, says,

It has decreased the movement's original marginality in exchange for artistic recognition and social status, which translates into improved economic conditions and greater power. Artists who were once part of the underground are now recruited by universities or offered posts by major copy-machine manufacturers, who have come to realize that sponsoring artistic events and endowing experimental workshops is good for their image. As a result of the media attention given to the periodic technological megashows which have multiplied, the pioneering centers, such as the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester and the Centre Copie-Art, created by Jacques Charbonneau, now appear as poor relatives and have progressively been placed outside the vast movement to which paradoxically they gave rise. ■

**MONIQUE BRUNET-WEINMANN** is a Montreal-based critic and curator who summers in Wellfleet.

JACQUES CHARBONNEAU, "Warriors II," 1993  
copigraphic transfer, on aluminium, Canon BJ1, and barbed wire

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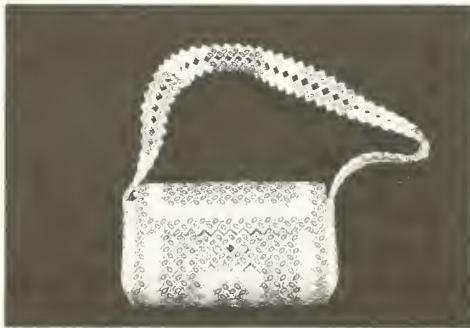
## OUTSIDER ART INSIDE PRISONS

by Peter Money

**B**efore prisons existed, offenders were kept in the shallows of the King's own castle, awaiting—sometimes indefinitely—sentence. These were prisoners of misfortune or prejudice and many were severely tortured. In the late 1700s, the English prison system adopted the principle of separate confinement and added "instruction" to conditions of imprisonment, but, even today, prisoner's are still denied basic rights, are kept in "segregation," the current politically correct term for solitary confinement, and are mentally and physically abused inside the walls our society has built. Yet, as Winston Churchill recognized, society's way of treating its prisoners was a reflection of its own governing philosophy and, ultimately, its humanity.

Free expression of prisoners is a hot topic in California, where I'm living, as it is in many parts of the country. As a society, we are "investing" more money than ever to construct new prisons. Prisoners are earning college degrees and graduate degrees while serving time. At Norfolk State Prison in Massachusetts, prisoners founded *Odyssey* magazine, though not without initial administrative protest. In Minnesota, prisoners started the first prison newspaper, the *Mirror*. Both periodicals were formed, in part, to address health and abuse issues that prisoners endure. Prison art classes have not come under the same scrutiny as these publications because the art classes are not run by prisoners themselves and because, for some reason, artistic expression tends to be less consciously a politicized attack on the institution and more a personal expression.

Phyllis Kornfeld, who has taught art in maximum and minimum security prisons, as well as in county jails, in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, and California, believes that we must teach prisoners to "love beauty and use their time creatively," especially since it is likely that these prisoners will re-enter the communities from which they came. Kornfeld told an audience at the San Francisco Art Institute recently that while she found it impossible to get traditional arts funding to work with prisoners, she found support inside the prisons. Surprisingly, prison administrators can be more progressive than arts administrators. Prison officials and those working within the prison industry realize that funding art is a relatively inexpensive way of keeping the peace. Many pris-



LELAND DODD, "Camels Purse"

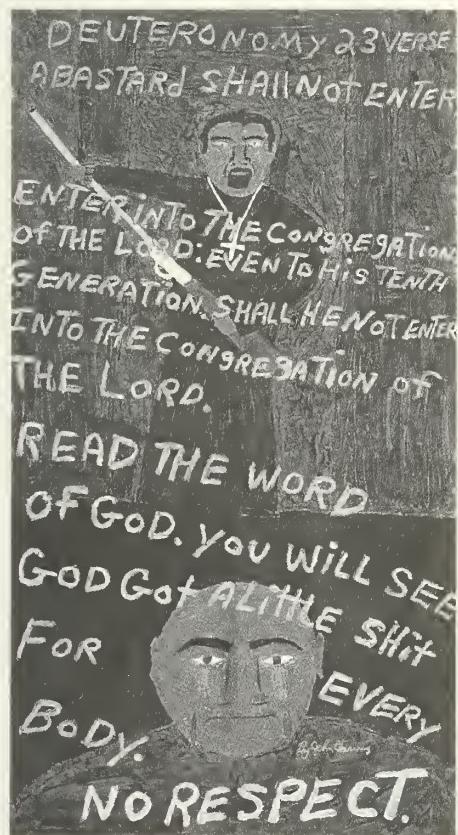


RONNIE WHITE, "Dream Time"



ANTHONY YAHOLA, "Desert Mirage"

oners are "finally finding something to believe in"—their own version of what Charles Dutton, an ex-con turned star-actor, called his "self-worth." Some will never walk out of prison, but they may pass along their humanity to those who do. Some prisoner-artists are contracted to make a sculpture for the member of another prisoner's family. Often they must invent new methods and materials due to the deprivation of their situation and environment. Prisoners have made frames, jewelry boxes, sculpture, and tattoos out of shells, rocks, toothpicks, popsicle sticks, handkerchiefs, toilet paper, guitar string, and toothpaste. Leland Dodd made a purse from



JOHN HARVEY, "The Bastard"



DANIEL WATSON, "Your Eyes on '93 You"

Camel cigarette wrappers. Figurines and scenes are formed from bars of soap. Prisoners are rarely permitted to hang their work in their own cells, but they have the satisfaction of seeing it hang in common areas and guard posts.

Kornfeld, who contemplated prison work only on the condition that she would not have to work with rapists, finds she accepts any prisoner who is willing to come to class and work. Many of her artists are poorly educated and most have never attempted an artistic project before. Yet their work is frequently powerful, often raw, and is getting attention. Not long ago the Phyllis Kind Gallery in New York held a show of Kornfeld's prison artists. "Desert Mirage" by Anthony Yahola reports his sense of conditions "outside" on a Native American reservation. "Dead Time" and "Dream Time" by Ronnie White are sketches-within-a-sketch in an Escher-like personal labyrinth. John Harvey's "The Bastard" narrates the echo of his own life as a preacher's son. Arthur Keigney depicts a hellish block inside Walpole. Daniel "Stretch" Watson's reptilian tails have eyeballs attached to their ends, and Kornfeld points out that the eyeball is a common image in prison art.

Many individuals outcast for criminal behavior are creating a type of Outsider Art described by Roger Cardinal in his 1972 book about postman Ferdinand Cherval, shoemaker Gaston Chaissac, stonemason Clarence Schmidt, furniture maker Guillaume, and odd job laborer Simon Rodia who built the Watts Towers. Each withstood the accusations of "buffoon," "loony," and "feverish zealot" to pursue their particular vision. Artists inside prisons are also a type of outsider, a group, championed by Jean Dubuffet, that now includes homeless artists, mentally-ill artists, graffiti artists, maverick poets, gangster musicians, and guerrilla artists. In fact, prisoners are probably the quintessential outsiders. It is an obvious pun. They are imprisoned inside the most drab institutions culture could democratically devise. From inside, however, some of them are dwelling like monks, creating art that is being exhibited in America's premier galleries and challenging us to evaluate uncommon lives. ■

**PETER MONEY** is a poet living in San Francisco. His interview with Allen Ginsberg appeared in *Provincetown Arts* in 1992.



# MULTICULTURALISM Is the Name of the Game

by David Bonetti

In the '90s art world, multiculturalism is the name of the game. As the North American population changes after decades of immigration from Asia and Latin America, and as new immigrant groups join African Americans and Native Americans in demanding access to cultural institutions, those institutions have been scrambling to find adequate ways to respond.

The motivation is seldom conversion to brotherhood-of-man philosophies. Fear of losing government and corporate funding that explicitly mandates multicultural participation at all levels is the reason the old-boy networks that dominate the boards of all cultural institutions in the U.S. are suddenly expanding their memberships. That opening-up on the top accompanies programming that has begun to acknowledge the wide range of cultural expression among living Americans and their forbears.

The change has had a tonic effect on cultural life, but it has also produced its share of absurd posturing and strange alliances. And there have been sharp criticisms of cooptation from some members of the groups that have been so precipitously "included." Chicago's Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum executive director Carlos Tortolero, for instance, has written that multiculturalism has been nothing more than a "cultural charade," in which "Eurocentric institutions are being rewarded for their past neglect by receiving the bulk of funding to interpret and present the artwork of people of color."

Across the country, tension is building between community-defined and mainline institutions over how to divide the increasingly shrinking amount of government and corporate funding.

As the debate over multiculturalism continues—not just funding issues, but what exactly the term means, who it includes, and how it is put into practice—San Francisco's new Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens will play a prominent role. The first from-the-ground-up institution founded with a mandate to explore and promote multicultural art expressions, Center for the Arts is a unique laboratory for defining what is turning out to be the crucial cultural issue of our time.

It would take a book to chart the history of how this complex of galleries and theaters sitting in a five-acre park came about, but suffice it to say it was a long time coming. Built on top of an underground expansion of the city's Moscone Convention center, it culminates a 30-year "urban renewal" process that began with the demolition of a scruffy neighborhood of SRO hotels that left a parking lot in its place and canankerous factions tearing themselves apart debating its future.

Against all likelihood, the results are brilliant architecturally. Center for the Arts is composed of two buildings: one is a 755-seat state-of-the-art theater designed by James Stewart Polshek; the other, a building with galleries and offices with a large, flexible space for performance designed by Pritzker Prize-winning Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki.

Both buildings are resolutely modernist. The theater is a de Stijl-inspired cubic composition that holds down the corner of the active site. The corrugated steel-clad gallery building adopts the metaphor of the laboratory. It appears to say that herein serious matters are being tested. Yet both buildings are inviting. The yellow lobbies of the theater with dramatic constructivist red canopies make you want to step right up and buy a ticket. And the Maki building also evokes the image of a modern riverboat floating in a garden. It suggests there are pleasures, albeit of a serious nature, to be had inside.

Despite the dissent of chronic malcontents, with which the bay area famously abounds, the buildings as presences in the urban environment are smashing successes. *New York Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp termed them, along with the new Mario Botta-designed San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco's strongest ensemble of modern buildings (SFMOMA, scheduled to open in January '95, is directly across the street from the complex).

Yet, it is what goes on inside that really matters.

The center has two directors. Baraka Sele, an outspoken Afro-centrist, previously of the Houston International Festival, is in charge of the performing arts. Renny Pritikin, long associated with New Langton Arts, San Francisco's leading alternative space, directs the visual arts programs.

Soon after their schedule was announced in late April, 1993, many in the arts community began to complain about its predictability and dullness, and there were murmurs that dreaded "political correctness" had raised its ugly head. The performance schedule, programmed by an out-of-towner, was particularly open to attack.

My colleagues at the *San Francisco Examiner* and I critically examined the announced schedule in the widely-read Sunday paper. The theater critic bemoaned that there was so little theater. I generally praised the arts programming, but raised questions about what I perceived as "vulgar multiculturalism" of one exhibition that seemed to suggest that white men and women—unless they possessed Spanish surnames—were not to be part of the new multicultural equation. But our outspoken classical music and dance critic, who lamented the total exclusion of classical European art, summarized that the Center's message was that "white European males need not apply."



PANORAMA OF YERBA BUENA GARDENS. (l-r): Center for the Arts Galleries and Forum, SF MOMA (in background), Center for the Arts Theater. Photo: Ken Friedman

All hell broke loose. We were inundated with letters attacking what was perceived as our reactionary positions. That all three arguments became confused with the music and dance critic's inflammatory remarks was not encouraging about the sophistication of the Bay Area arts community—or its ability to read.

That crisis over, the season opened with some success. The opening visual arts exhibition, "In Out of the Cold," was a victim of its own ambitions. Organized by Pritikin, it attempted to both identify how artists were responding to the post-Cold War era and highlight Bay Area artists from different cultural backgrounds. It should have been two exhibits, but it was crowded and rousing and a popular hit.

Subsequent exhibitions have dealt with contemporary Latin-American cultural identity, the art of Northern California women and the return of traditional painting techniques among artists who address political and social issues, along with some high-tech installations and a series of community-oriented shows featuring, for instance, quilts by African Americans.

After only six months, the Center is still on a honeymoon—I doubt that there is anyone who would say that it has changed his or her life. That's a utopian goal no arts center can hope to achieve. But the Center is already beginning to sketch out its vision. Because of the limits of time and space, that inevitably means a series of exhibitions and performances consecutively addressing the concerns of San Francisco's many cultural communities. Such a string of events that attracts only an audience basking in its own reflected image might—if it fills the galleries and theaters—be termed a success, but it would be a limited one.

The real challenge, as Amalian Mesa-Bains, a Chicana artist and theorist who is on the Center's board, put it in an interview on local PBS station KQED, is to get different groups interested in each other's cultures. The danger, she went on, is to make the assumption that blacks, for instance, want to look only at art made by blacks. What she hopes for her community is a continuous presence, for them to feel that the Center is a place for them, that it is a house of popular culture to which they can contribute as well as a place for elite art.

San Francisco is a city famous for its tolerance and open-mindedness. If a laboratory of multiculturalism fails here, it might prove to be an impossible dream. But if it succeeds, the whole country will have an example to follow.

**DAVID BONETTI** is an art critic for the *San Francisco Examiner*.



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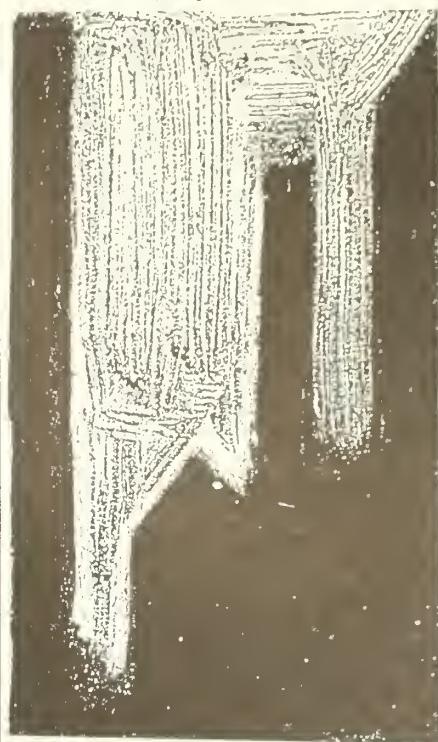
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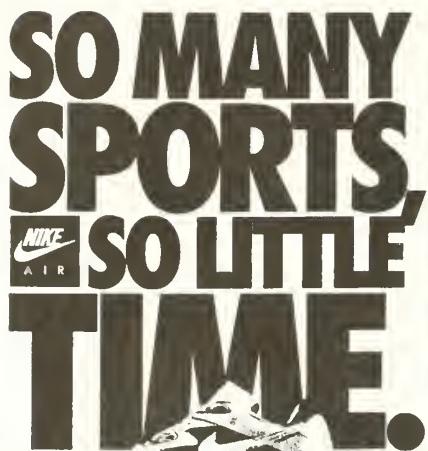
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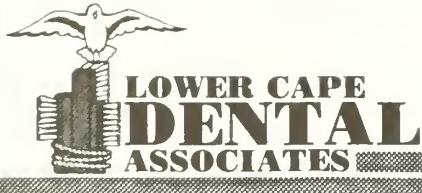
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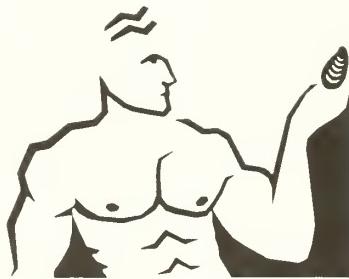
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## By the Pool, Years Later: Looking Back at Edmund White

*In those days I was not yet the ghost I've become.*

—EDMUND WHITE, *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*

by Richard McCann

FOR A LONG TIME, I wanted to have written Edmund White's *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*. Perhaps, like many gay men who began publishing stories and novels in the 1980s, I even wanted to be Edmund White.

I read *Nocturnes for the King of Naples* the summer I began writing fiction. I read it compulsively, in fact, almost slavishly, with a kind of sensual greed, underlining passages as if I might possess them, astonished by the triumphant ornamentation of White's fastidious but lyrical prose. Here was something greater than what I thought of as an ordinary novel, with its dull and primitive allegiance to the and-then-and-then of plot. Here, instead, was a novel composed of nocturnes, of reveries, of pensive melodies, of images and musicalities; a novel constructed of sensations, in which the narrative—a man searches in memory for his lost lover, with yearning and regret—was almost entirely submerged.

In fact, I read *Nocturnes for the King of Naples* so compulsively that I can not separate my memories of the novel from my memories of the summer in which I first read it. It was July. I was staying at an artists' colony in Virginia. By 10 o'clock each morning, the sun was already so high and fierce that the world beneath looked stunned and deadened; one afternoon, when I looked up from my littered workdesk, I saw a heat-crazed horse galloping headfirst into the barbed wire fence surrounding the field that contained him. But even more than the violence of each day's heat, or the considerable hours I spent alone at my desk, lost within the rhythms and moods of the sentences I was constructing, I recall a single afternoon I lay on a blue towel by the swimming pool, watching the man who had come to visit me as he slowly walked to the end of the diving board.

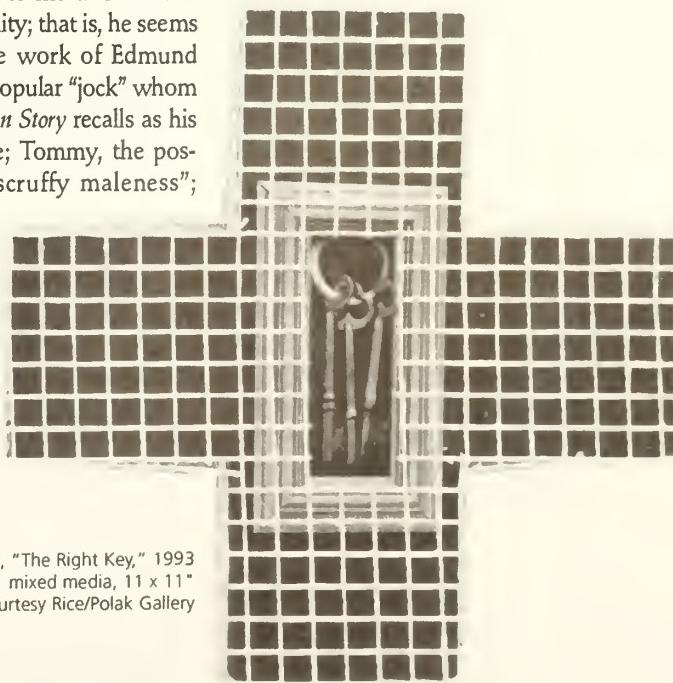
At the end of the board, he paused. He was tan and muscular, in a blue-and-gold striped Speedo.

Then he leapt, suddenly, and the board echoed the sound of its own springing. He arced his long body through air, and, for a moment, as he rose with his arms outspread, I thought he might take wing.

I recall the way he dove again; and after that, again; and the way he kept on diving, slicing his body through the blue water, and then resurfacing, over and over, for what seemed like half an hour. I recall the way he stood in my room afterwards, awkwardly explaining that he was straight, while he combed his wet hair. And I recall the way he turned his back toward me, modestly, as he changed into dry clothes.

In retrospect, he seems to me a kind of *ur* image of masculine sensuality; that is, he seems to me an image from the work of Edmund White. He is Tommy, the popular "jock" whom the narrator of *A Boy's Own Story* recalls as his best friend in adolescence; Tommy, the possessor of an enviable "scruffy maleness";

Tommy, who is "laughing and blondered by the sun and smooth-skinned," his "muscles like forked lightning on his taut stomach," his "torso flowering out of the humble calyx of his jeans." He is Tom, the teen-aged boy whom the narrator wistfully recollects in *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*—almost literally re-collecting him, that is, piece by piece from broken wholeness, until he is re-created from memory and thus restored to the narrative's present tense: "what is happening now is his step up onto the diving board, his pause, and then his slow stride and the bounce up into the night sky, where his clasps his knees, somersaults—and remains, dark pine trees all around the blazing sapphire pool."



RAY KEYTON, "The Right Key," 1993  
mixed media, 11 x 11"  
Courtesy Rice/Polak Gallery

THAT SUMMER I clipped a Calvin Klein advertisement from *Vanity Fair* and hung it over my desk. It pictured a Times Square billboard papered with the image of a man—a muscular god, to be precise—wearing nothing but a pair of Calvin Klein jockey shorts. Although the man on the billboard was standing in public, as it were, where everyone could see him, his head was thrown back, and the pouch of his white briefs bulged slightly, as if he were anticipating some private and sexual pleasure.

Did I hang this picture above my desk to guide the impulse of the fiction I was writing? To remind me of the man whom I'd watched dive into the pool? To pay homage to *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*?

The ad was famous. It even had a title: "A Brief Encounter."

Was everything sensual?

I don't mean to suggest that I borrowed my images from Edmund White; I don't mean to suggest that I sought to ape White's impeccable lyricism, even if I wanted to become, like White himself, a stylist *in extremis*. But I wanted to write about my sexuality, and, in doing so, I wanted to devise a language that might capture that which seemed fleeting and transitory, perhaps because I'd learned from my nights in gay bars and backrooms that "the impermanence of sexual possession was a better school than most for the way life would flow through your hands," as says the narrator says of White's "Running on Empty," or perhaps because I'd simply begun to fear that I was growing older.

In any case, I wanted to capture the ephemera of the sensual.

But how could one create it with the heavy brick and mortar of prose? The diver's body in mid-air above blue water. The man to whom I'd just made love crossing the lawn at night, his white trousers glowing like radium. A man in briefs on a billboard above Times Square.

That summer, as I read *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, I saw for the first time that the form of the novel could dare far more than I had imagined it might even propose. I saw, for instance, that plot was "the most insignificant part of a tale," as Trollope described it in his *Autobiography*; I saw that plot might be assembled from what White once quoted Ezra Pound as having termed as "glowing particles." I saw that a novel might be constructed from fragments and memories; from moments of yearning. I saw that it might be constructed as a lyric, as *tableaux vivants*, as instants outside-of-time.

THAT WHOLE SUMMER seemed like *tableaux vivants*, like instants outside-of-time.

It was 1984.

It was three years after the *New York Times* published its first news story about the existence of a possible "gay cancer."

But for me, who had lived overseas for most

of the previous six years, and who had felt deprived of the experience of "the contemporary urban American homosexual"—of the astonishing gay man in his cruising costumes, in his pink Polo shirt and khaki trousers, in his leather vest and Mineshaft T-shirt—it was a summer of making up for what seemed like lost time, a summer of relative abandon. Specifically, it was a summer of having sex in what would soon seem like "the old way": drunk, for instance, in a rope hammock with a Japanese painter; or in a blind alley, behind a metal Dumpster, with a man whom I'd just met in a piano bar; or in an expensive hotel room with a soap opera's costume designer, who rose above me with the white bedsheets draped around his shoulders, as if he were wearing a summer stole.

Sex, in "the old way"—which was in just about any way at all.

It was the summer before my gay brother died of a drug overdose, abandoned by the friends with whom he'd been partying. It was the summer before I returned to my ex-lover, who was shortly thereafter diagnosed as having AIDS.

AFTER THAT, nothing seemed outside-of-time.

How could one be outside-of-time in those hospital corridors? Time was everything. Everywhere one looked, one saw an electric clock hanging on the wall.

Time was everything. Dinner party chatter, circa 1986: "Was X still living that Christmas?" "Yes, but Y had already died."

Pages torn from a *Colt Magazine* calendar, like signifiers for the way time passes in a B-movie. 1981: GRID, "gay-related immunodeficiency." 1985: "A blood sample will be taken from your arm with a needle and analyzed in a laboratory using a test called ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay). If the ELISA test is positive, a second test, called Western Blot, will be run on the same blood sample to confirm the result." (Senator Jesse Helms: "The logical outcome of testing is a quarantine of those infected.") 1987: AL-721, "a miracle cure," a soluble egg lipid. They're using it in Israel. It tastes ghastly and makes you gag, so you spread it on toast.

Kemron. Compound Q.

AZT. DDI and ddC. Where were you the day *JFK* Rock Hudson died?

On the one hand, everything was narrative.

The narrative of 12-step recovery, for instance, which suddenly everyone seemed to be "sharing": "WHAT IT WAS LIKE. WHAT HAPPENED. WHAT IT'S LIKE NOW."

The narrative of the religious right-wing, as expressed by Pat Buchanan: "The poor homosexuals—they have declared war upon nature, and now Nature is exacting an awful retribution." The narrative of AIDS itself, the narrative of the disease's progression, often overdetermined and rigidly codified: the con-

tact with the the forlorn but infectious blood or semen; the fevers and night sweats and hacking coughs; the eventual diagnosis and the first appearance of stigmata; the gradual dimming, the wasting away.

Time was everything.

But on the other hand, even if everything was narrative, what had happened to the narrative of urban gay life, at least as it had been imagined and constructed along certain coordinates of race and class? —The earnest project of one's own joyous liberation, as if this modern self (*Goodbye, sad songs! Good night, Miss Peggy Lee!*) were something that history had authentically proposed. My lover sat on the sofa, taking his temperature over and over; he sat in the kitchen, feeling his swollen lymph glands. "I need to sleep," he said. He asked, "Do you think this room's too hot? Do you think I have a fever?"

Every group we talked about joining had a name that seemed an oxymoron: "Worried Well," "Positive Immunity."

In the narrative of gay life, as Edmund White points out in "Esthetics and Loss," "AIDS [was] not one more item in a sequence but a rupture in meaning itself." Was it any wonder then that the most important AIDS writing of the 1980s—at least the most moving, the most vividly ferocious—came not from Edmund White in *The Darker Proof: Stories from a Crisis* but from Paul Monette in *Love Alone: Eighteen Elegies for Rog and Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*? Paul Monette, who describes his life in *Love Alone* as having "suffered an irreversible stroke." Paul Monette, who describes his own language as "blood-cries" and his poetic voice as a "howl that never ends."

Time was everything: "The virus ticks in me," writes Monette in *Borrowed Time*.

The lyricism of witness, strained by the unspeakable, by its own didactic rages. The lyricism of the "exit wound," to borrow a phrase from artist Karen Bernmann's 1989 *Theater of Operations*: "Upon the occasion of emission, the mouth itself is a violated border, an exit wound; sobs and exclamations may break from the mouth as the utterance, so long a fugitive, tears its way out. Bleeding may accompany such emissions."

Which French surrealist was it who said that having come through "the time of fire"—World War I—he could never return to the painting of porcelain teacups or the portraiture of heiresses?

The failure of lyricism, as once formulated by René Char: "No bird has the heart to sing in a thicket of questions."

IT IS SUMMER, 1993, and I am staying at Yaddo, an artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, created by the legacy of Katrina Trask, who lost her children in the diphtheria and influenza epidemics of the late 19th century, and who thus died childless, willing her mansion and her es-

tate to generations of artists to come. (Dearest patron, dearest Katrina: Did you hope that art might answer these losses? In the music room your children stare from the dark frames of their antique portraits. But no one asks me to write one hundred times in a copy book: *I am sorry I flirted with men in the Pink Room. I am sorry I discandanced in the Composer's Tower.*)

I'm lying by the pool that John Cheever campaigned to have built, as if he meant to say that in order to make art, one would need sports, or indolence. It's a warm day, and I'm lying in the sun. A half-dream, drifting in and out, shredded from sleep: *The war is over. . . . On a day like this I could believe. . . . On a day like this. . . .*

I am re-reading *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*.

Dear book. Dear touchstone. Dear *memento mori*.

I can remember what I had loved so well that I once wished to have written it. I can see it here before me now.

I can recall my enthrallment with the narrator's secret griefs and whispered confessions; with his anguished and endlessly obsessive incantations to his lost lover, the absent "you," the wealthy older man whom he describes as his past, present, and future; with his longings and self-tormentings and sulky pouts, like those of a *jeune premier*.

I can recall my astonishment with what I then saw as the novel's transformation of homosexuality; with its elevation of anonymous sex to the level of the sacramental, so that the abandoned warehouse where men cruise for sex is described as a "ruined cathedral" each night crowded with "isolated men at prayer," "communicants telling beads or buttons pierced through denim, the greater number shuffling through, ignoring everything in their search for the god among [them]." And I can recall how it felt then to imagine that one's own anonymous cruising—one's own "sexual compulsion," as a therapist had termed it, one's own "desperate emptiness," one's own "squalid acting-out"—was in fact richer and more meaningful than one had ever imagined, particularly when one had always felt oneself as less.

I can recall how *Nocturnes for the King of Naples* felt like writing, *real writing*, at a time when North American gay writing was defined by Gordon Merrick's *One for the Gods*, perhaps, or by Patricia Nell Warren's *The Front Runner*.

Here at last was the world redeemed by metaphor, by what White calls the "wax and spices" of words! Here was the world as artifice, like the "nighttime cyclorama" of stars that one character makes by "pierc[ing] holes in the metal pie plates clamped to the lights" in the theater in which he lives. *Contra Naturum!* The "homosexual obsession" with stylistics, with "accessories," at last lifted to the level of the epiphanic; and here was the shameful faggot body, at last transfigured and glorified, an assemblage of fan-

tasy images, fetishistic detail: the soldier-short hair, the silk foulards, the pulsing maleness of an Adam's apple.

I remember what I had loved so well that I once wished to have written it.

In fact, I feel like the narrator of *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, when he confesses that he often recounts his tale in order to arouse emotions he does not wish to lose: "The lines [come] back to me, one by one, their intonations guided by the familiar verse, the gestures and smiles perfectly timed, automatic in the delivery but once expressed recalling the emotions they will always signify."

But now I cannot say that I would still want to write *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, even if I were able. In retrospect, it feels written from too a great distance, from behind sheer curtains; it now feels too written, that is. To borrow the phrase the narrator uses to describe the foppish men of Naples, wearing their silk pocket squares, it feels "beguiling but obviously studied." In the nine years since I first read it, there have been too many harder utterances: the language of necessity; the language of hospital wards, of diagnoses and treatments. *A needle will be introduced into the cornea. . . . Cryptosporidiosis, a parasite previously found only in livestock. . . . It always looks like a lot of blood to the patient. . . .*

For that matter, I doubt that Edmund White would now write *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, even if he were able. "What was it I wanted to do in my work after he all?" he asks in "*Esthetics and Loss*." He continues:

*Should I make my work simpler, clearer, more accessible? Should I record my fears, obliquely or directly in my work, or should I defy them? Is it more heroic to look disease in the eye, or should I continue going in the same direction as before, though with a new consecration?*

To some degree, one has his answer in his recent story "*Reprise*," which is in fact simpler, clearer, and more accessible, and in which he depicts the aging body not as the grotesquerie it seems in *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*—the fat man with a bald pate, the man who dusts "his swollen feet with lilac-scented talcum powder"—but as a mortal companion capable of both "rejoicing" and "lamenting," even "with its warts and wattles and long white hair." To some degree, one also has his answer in his recent biography of Jean Genet, whose later writing grew more determinedly political, as in his memoir *Prisoner of Love*, and who increasingly identified himself with the radical ideologies of the Black Panther Party and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

I HAVE RETURNED from Yaddo, with its ease, its luxuries. I have "things to do." I have been "very busy."

For instance: I have been visiting my friend Luis, who used to live upstairs from me, in the

apartment building we called *La Coventa*, back when we spent our evenings preparing our nuns' habits—black jeans, sleeveless white T-shirts—for the gay bars we often frequented together. In those years, we were acolytes, *hermanas*.

I have brought him back from the hospital, where he's just had a brain scan. (*That CT-scanner would blow a fuse*, he said, *if it could see my memories*.) Now we are sitting on his bed, studying the books that litter his nightstand: *Dancer from the Dance*, *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, *Surviving AIDS*. They are books he has meant to read for a long time, he says. *When he has time. When he has time.*

When he falls asleep, I make his lunch and leave it on the counter.

Then I go out for a walk. I don't know what I feel for *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, not really. Something like anger, perhaps, or love. Or something like the bewilderment I sometimes feel for my youth, finding it hard to bear my own memories of its lushness and its pleasures, just as I sometimes find it hard to bear the erotic and sensual prose of *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*—hard to bear, that is, amid one's hunger for it.

*In those days I was not yet the ghost I've become.*

This is my neighborhood. Here is Gel-Marc Towers, an apartment building once so popular among gay men that one had to wait years to get a one-bedroom there. Its summer roofdeck was legendary. Now there are plenty of vacant units. New African tenants sit on the front steps, playing their radios.

Here is the 7-11. Who shall remember how we lived?

Up ahead there is one man whom I might recognize, though I have never seen him before: a man in leather chaps and silver chains, walking down Columbia Road, toward Dupont Circle and the bars. *Dear man, I think, I could follow you a long way. . . .*

*I could follow you a long way. I could follow you all the way back to. . . . I begin to walk behind him.*

But I know the truth. Who hasn't been marked by these years? If he turned around, he would be no younger than I. ■

RICHARD MCCANN's fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Esquire*, *The Nation*, and other magazines. He is co-director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at The American University in Washington, D.C. His novel, *Mother*, will be published by Pantheon.

## From the Journals of B.H. Friedman:

### MARK ROTHKO



MARK ROTHKO AND ROBERT MOTHERWELL IN PROVINCETOWN, 1959  
Photo: Hans Namuth; Courtesy Dedalus Foundation

9 JANUARY 58

André Emmerich at the Reises': "My excitement in being an art dealers is always in the find, never in the sale."

Me: "Never?"

Mark Rothko (interrupting): "These are mysteries I don't understand."

Emmerich: But your creative activities make these mysteries possible."

Me: "Rothko understands these mysteries as well as any of us." Exit Rothko. Then to

Emmerich: "Why are you so polite?"

Emmerich: "It's my business to be polite."

7 JUNE 60

We're trying to get Jackson into a good nursery school, but now the problem is solved. Rothko told us how easy it was, as an artist, to get his daughter into school. Motherwell said the same about his daughters. Perhaps I should stop writing and paint.

19 NOVEMBER 60

At Becky and Bernard's, Mark Rothko, who has been a tenant in one of the Sixth Avenue buildings we're planning to demolish and replace with a hotel, said, seemingly as a joke, that we ought to put a plaque where he had lived so many years. (The lease register showed that his tenancy went back to when his name was Marcus Rothkowitz.) But as he pursued the subject and it became obvious that he wasn't joking, I replied, "I hope that Rockefeller Center will go along with placing more than plaques. I want to commission works by contemporary artists."

"I've had enough of that," Rothko said, referring to the Four Seasons commission he had finally rejected.

"Ray Parker told me the paintings you did for the Four Seasons are among your best."

"Yes, I'll be eternally grateful to the restaurant for creating the possibility—the illusion of the possibility—of a place for that work. But when the restaurant was finished I knew my work didn't belong there."

"Why?" I asked, wanting to confirm what Ray had told me—that Rothko was disappointed to discover that what had been described to him as a private executive dining room turned out to be part of the public restaurant.

He beckoned to his wife, Mel. "It's getting late, I think we'd better leave."

16 JANUARY 61

27 MARCH 65

26 FEBRUARY 76

Bill Copley insists that America painters take themselves too seriously and that they lack the sense of humor typical of the Paris Surrealists. I assure Bill that he would like Franz Kline and Barney Newman, among others he hasn't met. However, he won't come to the Rothko opening at MoMA. He finds Rothko pompous, dull, monotonous.

So Abbey and I and Jimmy Metcalf go without Bill. It's very crowded. We move past Rothko's large paintings toward the bar. There, Helen [Frankenthaler] asks if I've seen her painting among the recent acquisitions upstairs. I haven't. Just before closing Abby and I find it.

Downstairs I ask Helen about the donor.

"I'll tell you at Dillon's"

At the museum coatroom Franz Kline and I discover we both have Burberrys. "Whose do you think is heavier?" he asks, smiling.

"They look about the same," I reply, "Try mine." I hold it up for him and he gets into it, with the sleeves hanging over his hands and the coat almost touching the ground. He laughs and holds his for me, which is, of course, very short. We're both laughing as we return each other's coats and agree to have a nightcap at Dillon's.

It seems as though the entire crowd from the opening is there. Kline gives his pack of Kents to Helen. I give my pack of Camels to him. He asks, "May I offer you a Kent?" and points to Helen.

Just then the Rothko's arrive. I tell him I'll put up the plaque, resuming a conversation of two months before at the Reises'. (They're now at the Bar, too.) I take a card from my pocket and print:

MARK ROTHKO  
WORKED HERE  
19\_\_ - 1960

I asked Mel Rothko to fill in the Blank. Their daughter was three when they moved into the building, and is now ten, so Mel tells me, it was 1953. "But," she complains, "it sounds like Rothko didn't work any place else."

I add, under WORKED HERE:  
(AMONG OTHER PLACES)

"That sounds peculiar," Mel says.

"It wasn't my idea," I reply, crossing out the parenthetical phrase and handing the card back to her.

She consults with Mark. He studies the card, then says, "I'd prefer LIVED HERE. But do any of us know whether we're really living at any given moment? Do we know if we live at all?"

"Edit it any way you like," I say.

"No, I guess it's all right."

Al Held had been explaining the subtlety of Motherwell's painting. Frank O'Hara replied, "You give us credit for being able to read black and white, for being able to see the difference between them, but when it's ochre and umber—what a lovely phrase 'ochre and umber'—you think we can't see the difference. It's not that hard."

Held tried again, this time concentrating on his inability to work up enthusiasm when putting up a painting a year or so after completing it. Frank: "Who cares about your enthusiasm. Just put up the painting. Do you think the time-lag is any less with writing?"

Frank spoke for some time on the mechanics of publishing, presenting the facts without asking for sympathy. He finished with a quote from a scene set at the Cedar Tavern in a play by him and Larry Rivers: "An old lady walks in and says, 'I'm Mark Rothko's mother.' The point is that art history doesn't exist until later."

25 FEBRUARY 74

I'm tired of hearing the art world, especially dealers, talk about Rothko's victimization by Bernard Reis. Rothko selected Reis and for years accepted his tax angles. He selected Stamos and Morty Levine as friends. No matter how insensitive to conflicts of interest the first two were and no matter how naively Levine acted (or didn't act) as an executor, I don't believe any more in their conscious guilt than in Rothko's unconscious innocence. If he is a victim of anything it's of his own greed.

An ironic aspect of the case is Reis's inability to use his best defense: That by selling a large group of Rothkos at a low price he was reducing estate taxes. The I.R.S. would attack this as collusion against the government. There was irony, too, in the opening testimony when the lawyers for Marlborough had to argue against Rothko being a "great" artist.

John Myers talked endlessly about the Rothko case, how much the art world has changed, how UGLY, EVIL, CORRUPT it has become. As he went on, having come here to interview me but unable to stop interviewing himself, I thought how little he has changed: he talks more, drinks more, weighs more, laughs more hysterically but he is still the same John Myers—not always accurate but often entertaining. ■

B.H. FRIEDMAN has written fiction, biography, criticism, and plays. He is currently editing his journals, tentatively titled *Turning Out the Lights*.

**"I'd prefer LIVED HERE.  
But do any of us know  
whether we're really living  
at any given moment?  
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## Mark Rothko: A Biography

by James E. B. Breslin  
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

## Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience

by Stephen Polcari  
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

JAMES BRESLIN BEGINS HIS BOOK BY "exposing" his subject's contradictory soul. Rothko is described as working eight hours a day, harder than he ever had before, painting murals he "was proclaiming [had an] exalted, even sacred character" for New York's Four Seasons restaurant in the new Seagram Building. But he also quotes Rothko as saying, "I accepted this assignment as a challenge, with strictly malicious intentions. I hope to paint something that will ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room." Eventually Rothko resolved this conflict himself by turning back the commission and having the paintings installed in a chapel-like room of their own at the Tate Gallery in London, but Breslin does not fare as well with his basic conflict over whether or not to like his own subject, Rothko.

It matters, especially when the biographer has had no first hand experience of the subject, as Breslin did not, and must rely on other people who did. All of those people have naturally had their own conflicts with the person in question, which no biographer can resolve. My personal belief is that one must make a decision about the subject based on your feeling about that person's work and then pick amongst your sources to support that feeling. Breslin started off with such an essential feeling based upon his gut response to Rothko's work, but it doesn't seem to have sustained him through the long process of getting to know the man through the people in his life. For instance, when you interview them, as I did for my book, *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art*, one friend praises Rothko's erudition to the skies while another says he rarely read a book, and some of Rothko's most intimate friends would say terrible things about him behind his back even

while he was alive. Because their own places in the art world pantheon are so marginal, fellow artists being interviewed commonly develop intense jealousies about the artists now considered to be the major abstract expressionists. The biographer walks a minefield retracing the subject's steps through life, just as the subject did while making the journey that was important enough to warrant post-mortem scrutiny. Giving credence to both sides of every Rothko story can, as it has here, make a conflicted man seem hopelessly mired in unresolvable contradictions.

All artists are full of contradictions. They "contain multitudes," as Walt Whitman put it. One has the idea that Breslin simply compiled all the myriad conflicting quotes, statements, and opinions he heard and presented them to us for us to make up our minds about what kind of a man Rothko was. Biographers should get beyond or beneath the material they gather and find the underlying streams of consciousness which run most consistently through their subject. Breslin tries again and again to do this with the idea that Rothko's boyhood emigration to this country was the major traumatic event of his life, affecting just about every thing that happened later. He brings it in like a haunting refrain so often that the reader begins to anticipate its imminent arrival with dread. The loss of his father so soon thereafter might have been a more important event psychologically, but neither trauma seems to have kept Rothko from making amazingly swift progress in the English language and in school in the next few years. One is sorely tempted to think the author protests too much about the importance of either event. In his February 17, 1994, response to Jack Flam's review in the *New York Review of Books*, however, Breslin pointed us to a really important insight

into Rothko (which was only mentioned in passing in the book) when he wrote, "Rothko was a claustrophobic, and my argument about his signature paintings as attempts to create a space of freedom is developed throughout the book." It was, over and over, but without the author having constructed a strong psychological anchor to tie that complex to the body of Rothko's work, it just floated repeatedly on and off the page like one of his incessant rectangles.

In his angry response to Flam's criticism of his book's unquestionably annoying repetitiveness, Breslin states the following about one particular instance: "I repeated the language from the first sentence not because I am an idiot who can't remember from one page to the next what I've written, but as a lead into an elaboration . . ." Perhaps Mr. Breslin thinks that his readers are idiots because they need constant reminders of what was just said in order to understand what is about to be said. We don't. Is he condescending to the art world as a lower intellectual order than his accustomed literary circles? I wouldn't be surprised if he couldn't have eliminated at least one third of the 700-page length of his book if he had cut out all the unnecessary, repetitious verbiage. Did someone edit this book? And, while I'm on it, who fact checked the book? It's Jeanne Bultman, not Joan, Selina Trieff, Hubert Crehan, Asheville, and so on.

But these are petty matters. The real problem with the book is the author's lack of familiarity with art. He is a literary critic who is led to examine paintings in detail for subject matter that isn't there and he can be blind before Rothko's nuanced ambiguity, particularly in his treatment of the mythological paintings of the early '40s. Breslin doesn't mention the obvious influence of John Marin on Rothko's early watercolors, though it has been cited before, as has the importance of his teacher Max Weber. Bernard Karfiol, who selected Rothko for an early exhibition, might well have borne examination for potential influence, as might have the more obscure fellow members of The Ten. Because his interviewing of survivors from the 1930s brought him to Joseph Solman's door, he didn't miss the effect Solman's subway scenes had on Rothko's own. Reading other recent theorists on Rothko, he found Anna Chave's connections between Rothko's horizontally-oriented *Entombment* paintings and his mature, stacked rectangles. But Breslin failed to see the

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connection between *The Rothkowitz Family*, an early painting he is probably the first to have reproduced, and Rothko's mature image. Drop out the features and details and all you have is warm red and pink nested rectangles with blurry edges. Even the reclining positions of mother and baby are worth mentioning in light of the horizontality that characterizes most of Rothko's mature work, and which was a favorite Rothko position in life.

Because of his background as a literary critic, Breslin's forte as Rothko's biographer is his careful reconstruction of Rothko's Russian background and his family life. One gets more of a feeling for Rothko there than from the author's use of Rothko's close friends. Actually Rothko never comes alive as a member of a group of friends. Breslin is on firm ground using Rothko's student's recollections of what their teacher said and the transcript of the talk he gave at Pratt Institute in 1958; his "Scribble Book," a notebook he kept in the late '30s; and the records of the trial of his lawsuit over some very early commercial work. All this was new information and as welcome as water in a desert to those of us who have reread Rothko's statements and writings of the '40s so often in every exegesis on abstract expressionism that they have practically lost their meaning. Breslin is good about using Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to help us understand Rothko's paintings, but since he surely knows those sources of inspiration better than many of us in the art world, he might have done even more with them. The same is true of the importance of the Greek tragedies to Rothko; one doesn't feel that Breslin understands the gut wrenching emotion Rothko got out of those works. Rothko was rereading Tolstoy's immensely depressing diaries when he committed suicide, but they are not mentioned. And those Greek Patristic scholars some friends claim Rothko loved to read, obscure and difficult as they might be, why no discussion of them or their possible influence on the Rothko chapel in Houston? (Perhaps Breslin believed the friend who said he didn't think Rothko really did read.) Then there are the contemporaries. Stanley Kunitz was a close friend who merits a host of citations in the index about Rothko, but no discussion of his own very highly-regarded poetry and its possible meaning for Rothko.

And then there is the strange case of Ezra Pound who gets left out of yet another discussion of the literary influences on the abstract expressionists, but who was actually at least as important to many of them as T.S. Eliot, and far more important to some, like Adolph Gottlieb. In 1940, Gottlieb and Rothko collaborated on an exploration of mythological themes inspired by Pound's idea that all tradition is ever

present which Pound expressed in four key words: "All ages are contemporaneous." Pound's "motto" "Make strong old dreams lest this our world lose heart," gave the intellectual artists of the early '40s war years a rallying cry, and his concept of Imagism—things "that hath a code but not a core"—pervades their thinking. Pound was so important to the group most central to Rothko during the '30s—Avery, Gottlieb and Newman—that his influence must be assessed. Pound's is the voice you hear echoed in their numerous statements and writings of the '40s, not Eliot's. Pound's subsequent fall from grace during World War II clouds his picture to this day. I would have thought a literary scholar like Breslin might have cleared it up.

In art historian Stephen Polcari's discussion of Rothko in his book *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* the author does little better in the Pound department, but his analysis of Rothko's paintings in the light of the Greek tragedies is fascinating and he is very good on Nietzsche as well. It sounds like one imagines Rothko thinking. Polcari's discussion of the meaning and the events of World War II had for Rothko was particularly illuminating:

The bitter irony for Rothko and his generation was that the living tradition was one of tragedy, death, and periodic entombment. Rothko's early choice of the *Orestia* was auspicious for him, for as an archaic tale of suffering and strife, it asked why and to what end human beings suffer, a most relevant question in the 1940s.

And, expectably, Polcari far surpasses Breslin in the analysis of Rothko's paintings. He establishes very convincing visual ties between Rothko's paintings, both early and mature, and the art Rothko often visited in the Metropolitan Museum, especially the Greek objects and the Roman frescos. Now we better understand why Rothko claimed in later years to have been painting Greek temples all his life.

Polcari is also excellent on the connections he makes between visual elements of World War II—such as the snarly-toothed mouths on the Flying Tigers' fighter planes—and some of Adolph Gottlieb's imagery. Gottlieb and Barnett Newman were Polcari's initial inspiration, and so it is fitting that he shines in their and Rothko's chapters, the places where he best fulfills his book's mandate. Rejecting the formalism of yesteryear which ignored the artists' endlessly stated commitment to content in their abstractions, Polcari sets out to redefine abstract expressionism as a mid-'40s movement concerned with highly specific kinds of content:

In the 1940s mytho-ritual is one, if not the most important, subject and theme of abstract expressionism. It distinguished

abstract expressionism from surrealism and most of the art of the period.

Most of the abstract expressionists employ myth, ritual, and ceremony in their work, from Rothko's and Pollock's *Rituals* of 1944 and 1953 to Gottlieb's *Quest* of 1948 to Lipton's *The Grail* of 1965.

But do they? Rothko and Gottlieb purposefully focused on Greek mythology in their search for new forms of expression, but not for long. Newman wrote and talked a good deal about myths, but he wasn't painting at all in the late '30s and early '40s. The strongest painters of these years were Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Motherwell, each of whom had little or no use for rituals and ceremonies, though they might upon occasion title a painting as if they had. To the extent of his involvement with Jung and Native American art, Pollock can be said to have been mythologizing, but in a highly unorganized, hit-or-miss manner. In the main, like Gorky, de Kooning, and Motherwell, he was busy taking on the great painters who had defined modernism up until then—Picasso and Matisse, Mondrian and Kandinsky, Miro and, in his special case, the Mexican muralists. The other important abstract expressionist painters, Franz Kline, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Lee Krasner, Hans Hofmann, Philip Guston and James Brooks, were all dealing with cubism's aftermath and were not interested in myth. The situation is more complex with William Baziotes and Clyfford Still who were, at least in part.

William Baziotes was fascinated by all manner of mythic and mysterious things, but he too was dealing with Picasso. He said the following about his exhaustive study of Picasso's 1939 MoMA retrospective (quoted in Rudi Blesh, *Modern Art USA*, Knopf, 1956):

Well, I looked at Picasso until I could smell his armpits and the cigarette smoke on his breath. Finally, in front of one picture—a lone figure on a beach—I got it. I saw that the figure was not his real subject. The plasticity wasn't either—although the plasticity was great. No. Picasso had uncovered a feverishness in himself and is painting it—a feverishness of death and beauty.

Clyfford Still, as always, is a different case. He rejected all of European and American modernism and found inspiration instead in Turner and Blake, Cezanne, and American eccentrics like Charles Burchfield. But because a colleague likened Still to a shaman by calling him an "Earth Shaker," Polcari constructs an elaborate structure of mythic, primitive, shamanistic content around Still to which he can only make

the most tenuous ties. Titles, Polcari's customary crutch in such an endeavor, are of no help with an artist whose oeuvre is largely untitled. It might be that the colleague was involved with shamanistic signs, but one doesn't leave the chapter convinced that Still was.

Except for some minor sculptors like Seymour Lipton and David Hare who took up the cause and articulated it in a way that comforts later scholars (just as Gleizes and Metzinger did with cubism), it simply isn't true that "most of the abstract expressionists employ myth, ritual and ceremony in their work." Polcari has had to wield a mighty shoehorn to convince anybody that they did. He is at his best in his discussions of Rothko, Gottlieb, and Newman where he has their words and their real commitment to the modern experiences he deems crucial. Motherwell, despite his love of Frazier's *The Golden Bough*, which he remembered thinking of then as the artist's Bible, saw Picasso and Matisse as the crucial "modern experiences."

Polcari is trying to link very disparate artists, which is an admirable goal, but very tricky with this particular group. Some were interested in recapitulation theory and universal archetypes, and some weren't. *The Golden Bough* wasn't everyone's Bible, but there's no denying that Fraser and Jung were common parlance among intellectuals in the '40s just as Mead and Freud were in the '50s. Artists, however, have traditionally been separated from intellectuals by an "and." In defining abstract expressionism as a 1940s movement, rather than as one which crystallized in 1950, as I and most critics and involved artists believe it did, Polcari is twisting its shape to fit his Procrustean bed.

—APRIL KINGSLY

April Kingsley, the author of *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionism and the Transformation of American Art* (Simon & Schuster, 1993), is a curator at the American Craft Museum in New York.

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## Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First American Avant-Garde

by Jonathan Weinberg  
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

"There is a crusade against vice in Lancaster. . . . I am going home to speak for vice."

—CHARLES DEMUTH

JONATHAN WEINBERG'S EXPLORATION of homosexuality in the art of Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley, within the context of the American avant-garde before the Second World War, is a response to the fact that most critics, while acknowledging the artists' homosexuality, have ignored its influence on their work. Before proceeding with his study, Weinberg, a painter and an assistant professor of art history at Yale University, is careful to recognize several problems with which he must grapple. He must provide a context for understanding what homosexuality meant in the time of Demuth and Hartley. By looking at medical and legal documents as well as at theories of homosexuality from the time (such as those of Havelock Ellis and Freud and his followers), and by examining a few examples of homosexuality in the works of literary and visual artists of the American avant-garde, Weinberg establishes the status of homosexuality during the period in question, and in the American avant-garde in particular (which was, sadly, more-or-less the same). He shows that homosexuality was particularly threatening to early 20th-century society not because it was such an obviously different mode of being, but because—as Freud pointed out—it was not.

Another problem Weinberg confronts is that of identifying homosexual content in work made during a homophobic time. Finding a gay text, he argues, can not always be done simply by a close reading of the work of art. Indeed, Weinberg writes that locating homosexual content in Hartley's early work is "often a matter of deciphering a code, the key to which is provided only by private sources." This leads him into an eloquent and persuasive argument for biography as a useful, if not essential component, of art criticism. He emphasizes that "biography has a role in verifying interpretation" and goes on, more emphatically, to argue that biography is "essential on a political level—that certain artists took the risk of exposure to create records of homosexuality. . . . To leave out biography is to read out the role of art as both a form of self-revelation and a means of liberation from the prohibitions society places around those it deems abnormal." Thus the body of his book, the flesh and blood and heart,

is concerned with Demuth's and Hartley's lives and works, and with exploring how these friends (who shared a house in Provincetown during the second decade of the century) reconciled their self-consciously "American" art with their own marginalized status as both homosexuals and avant-garde artists.

While Demuth and Hartley were fairly discreet about their homosexuality, both produced work—particularly late in their lives—which focused on the male body as an object of desire (though Hartley never as blatantly as Demuth). Culling information from their letters and writings as well as from interviews and memoirs of those who knew them (such as William Carlos Williams and Alfred Stieglitz), Weinberg discovers that Demuth was most likely more out in his work than in his life, and that the opposite was true of Hartley.

One of the most fascinating sections of the book is Weinberg's discussion of the artists' different ways of representing homosexuality in painting without depicting sexual acts or their imminence. The most obvious, of course, is through symbolism. But more subtly, Weinberg identifies such methods as reversing the genders of the figures in a painting, as well as the mere absence of heterosexuality. Hartley's "Christ Held by Half-Naked Men," an all-male *pietà* (one of 82 reproductions in the book), is an example of the former. Weinberg contrasts Hartley's *pietà* with what is perhaps his best known work, "Portrait of a German Officer," a perfect example of homosexuality appearing and not appearing in a work of art. Of "Portrait," which depicts emblems of war—a soldier's metal, flags, numbers and initials for identifying the dead—overlapped on a black field, Weinberg observes that "it may be no coincidence that Hartley's work reaches its most abstract stage when he attempts to express his love for another man."

Weinberg cites Demuth's "Eight O'Clock" series (several paintings depicting three men in a domestic setting in various states of undress) as an example of representing homosexuality by the absence of heterosexuality. Whereas most critics now recognize the homosexual content of the paintings, Weinberg points out that in its time the series allowed for an ambiguous reading, and he believes Demuth "relied on society's willingness to desexualize male relationships." Though only late in his career and not exhibited during his lifetime,

Demuth also made blatantly erotic paintings, which Hartley never did. In Demuth's "Three Sailor's on a Beach," for example, a sailor sits naked on the sand revealing his erect penis and stares at the erect penis of a man who stands above him (the implication is that we are witnessing the preliminaries of fellatio). There are also several paintings of sailor's urinating, sometimes with one sailor holding another's penis, as well as suggestive Turkish bath scenes.

But the refreshing thing about Weinberg's book is that while he explores the homosexual content in the paintings of Demuth and Hartley, he is by no means determined to find signs of homosexuality and symbols of male genitalia everywhere he looks. He takes critics to task for reading Demuth's flower paintings as erotic. "The greatest danger of the label 'decadent,'" he writes, "is that it has given art historians the permission to find clandestine subject matter in all aspects of Demuth's diverse work." Weinberg refuses to allow Demuth to be ghettoized as he convincingly argues that Demuth carefully chose the subjects in which he represented sexuality. And in a sly and incisive observation, Weinberg writes that Demuth's very awareness of his audience—of what was permitted when and where—is probably more telling of his homosexuality than his occasional punning on male genitalia.

Though Hartley was never as explicit as Demuth in his representations of homosexuality, like Demuth he did make paintings with overt homoerotic content late in his life. Throughout his discussion of Hartley, Weinberg observes that "the most striking characteristic of several of Hartley's paintings—their expression for the love of men for men in the context of death—was that Hartley seemed capable of making art about love only when the lover was dead." "Portrait of a German Officer" was painted in memory of a young German soldier, Karl von Freyburg, with whom Hartley was in love. Another example is "Eight Bells Folly (Memorial for Hart Crane)," which Hartley painted after Crane's suicide. And finally, there are the paintings of the Mason sons (the Nova Scotian family with whom he spent his last years), which, again, Hartley executed after their deaths by drowning. In painting these memorials, Weinberg writes, "Hartley found a way of representing homosexuality without the danger of isolation that an overt display would certainly have caused." While Demuth's late work was largely divided between the public and private spheres, that is, the sexually neutral and the homosexual, Hartley, Weinberg argues, longed to synthesize his life and work by attempting to "find a place for homosexuality out in the open," specifically in his life with, and paintings of, the Mason family. In "Fishermen's

Last Supper," one of Hartley's last major works, he pictures a family in which he is united with the Mason sons in a physical and emotional relationship sanctioned by their parents.

While both Demuth and Hartley spent a lot of time in Europe where homosexuality was more accepted, as well as in such sophisticated American locales as New York and Provincetown, both eventually settled in small towns less conducive to a homosexual lifestyle, Demuth in his hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Hartley in a small fishing community outside of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Weinberg finds both artists, at the end of their careers, "attempting to place the homosexual experience within the sphere of the native. And so, leaning forward and perhaps positing the task of gay artists in the second half of the 20th century, to whom one hopes he might next extend his considerable talents, Jonathan Weinberg eloquently concludes this judicious and bold book.

—ROBIN LIPPINCOTT

Robin Lippincott's reviews, fiction, and essays have appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *Crosscurrents*, *The Literary Review*, *The Bloomsbury Review*, and many other journals. He recently completed a collection of stories, *The "I" Rejected*.

## Survivors: Experiences of Childhood Sexual Abuse and Healing

by Khristine Hopkins  
CELESTIAL ARTS

KHRISSINE HOPKINS' BOOK ATTEMPTS to cross several boundaries while at the same time connecting those spaces differentiated by these boundaries. This is done literally in that the book combines photographs with text, personally in that the book was and is born of highly intimate metaphors arising from first-hand experiences, and lastly, aesthetically, for the book, though being highly personal, chooses to adopt visual portraits which are not about making a specific personality or individual recognizable, but about illustrating aspects of personality and experience which we all hold in common.

The book came about after the author regained memory of her own childhood abuse and, after suffering from an artistic block as the result of these new memories, sought to use her own photographs and the words of fellow survivors to help her work through this block. The result is a series of photographs, each accompanied by a short, sometimes lyrical, sometimes narra-

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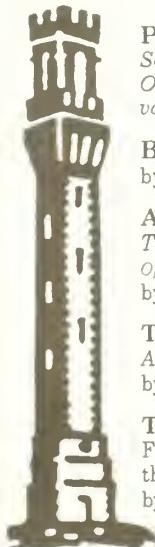
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tive, fragment of writing by the subject of each photograph.

Although the book is about survivors of sexual abuse, a sort of visual and poetic journey through the various stages of understanding, recognition, and healing, the fact that the photographs in this book are not mere straightforward portraits of the women speaking allows the book to be about surviving more than sexual abuse: it is about the very process of recognition of the self as it exists in this moment, understanding how that self was formed and came into being as a consequence of the past, and how the self may possibly be transformed into a more whole future through these acts of recognition and understanding.

The format of the book works toward this process. The first photograph is of a young child, the author's child, and it is the only photograph not accompanied by a confessional text. The implication is of silence, of the inability to speak, of the turning into a frightening handicap that which should be sacred and protected: the innocence and trust each of us embody as children. A lovely photograph by itself, it becomes especially meaningful and moving in light of the photographs which follow.

The succeeding photographs chronicle the processes mentioned earlier. Eight women, including the author, are given room to voice their feelings and thoughts, and each thought is accompanied by a photograph. The first, after the picture of the child, is of Mary. "He's looking for me. I close my eyes, block my ears, and even hold my breath. It's too late. He's found me. I feel myself crying inside, then and now." This text not only describes very viscerally the initial trauma, it also simply and poignantly shows how the moment is still happening, a moment of past fear kept alive, perpetually propelling its victim blindly into a darkening future. The accompanying photograph, that of a woman crouching in a darkened room, serves both as illustration of this emotion and as enhancement of it.

The rest of the photographs cultivate a similar relationship to their respective texts. Each is a photograph of a woman in an often startling and sometimes almost mythic setting. The early words are about confinement, about feelings of being trapped, and the corresponding photographs are often set indoors or in deeply isolated landscapes. As the words begin to reveal moments that turn towards healing, the photos

shift and take on more neutral, even transitory subjects: someone walking with a child between inviting, though still empty, houses; someone standing in a darkened room, opening a door towards light. They seek not to simply show us what the text is already revealing, but, through the use of metaphor as it can only exist in the visual form, augment and deepen the viewer's and the subject's understanding of the moment. The viewer becomes no longer just viewer, but witness to a painful and encouraging voyage.

Each of these photographs is hand-colored, a process which adds to the often dreamlike and wistful quality they imply. By combining words which were born in pain with images which seek to aesthetically explain how that pain can be shed, Hopkins has created a book which is

both very moving for its treatment of such a delicate subject, and relevant, because it transcends the concerns of one particular group and makes them germane to all. In her foreword, Hopkins states her belief that healing is possible, healing that transforms victims into survivors, and the proof of this belief is seen in the departure of the final photograph from the rest of the book. The subject, who is pregnant, faces us head on, as an individual, while the text, which is purely affirmative, is presented anonymously, without an accompanying name which would make what is being said specific to one person. Obviously an intended paradox in light of the rest of the book's format, this final image and its accompanying words—"healing at last, we make a choice to pass through fire, . . . to become whole"—attest to the power of this book to transcend its stated subject. —LUCY GREALY

Lucy Grealy is a poet and the author of *Autobiography of a Face*, forthcoming from Houghton Mifflin. A section of her book received the National Magazine Award in Essays & Criticism.



NANCY: "How did I feel? . . . in pieces, fragmented, fearful that I would never be able to fit those pieces together . . . this part wife, that part child, never entirely myself, never really whole."

## The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village: 1960-1965

by Samuel R. Delany  
MASQUERADE BOOKS

FOR YEARS MY FAVORITE THOUGH NOT my only reading has been non-fiction, especially biography and autobiography. I used to read a lot of science fiction, but now only occasionally. So I come to the autobiographical account of the early life of Samuel R. Delany, the well-known and award-winning author of science fiction, including *The Jewels of Aptor* and *Dhalgren*.

There must be many such accounts of African Americans fighting their way up through a system that ignores them—James Baldwin comes to mind. This book has other dimensions. It becomes a novel told in the first person, gratifyingly frank, especially about the author's sexual preferences—gay. He tells of his predilection for men with chewed-on fingernails and large workmen's hands which to him show character. He tells of touching the hand of a corpse, laid out for an autopsy in his father's funeral home, which caused him to have an erection.

Chip—his nickname—displays in this book a touching relationship with the poet Marilyn Hacker, in spite of their failed marriage, and he quotes generously from her poetry. She was a valuable influence on him when they were classmates at the Bronx High School of Science, where he already wrote poetry, plays, and had begun a novel, as well as played the violin and made translations of European classics. All well-written autobiographies read like novels, and this autobiographical protagonist is utterly convincing. We see a real person, one that does not have to be described or invented, whose character evolves from his experiences in a way that is impossible to match in a work of pure fiction, especially in science fiction, where characterization, it is said, is particularly weak. While I do not pretend to be an authority on Chip's sci-fi novels, I have read the two books mentioned already.

*Dhalgren* is a telling and frightening forecast of the death of the inner city, but both its main character and the one in *Jewels* seem somewhat directionless and random. Yet in *Motion of Light in Water* the main character, Chip, just by living, merely from being born, existing and heading toward what we know eventually will be the grave (though not yet; he's only 54), seems so purposeful, so self-directed, so inevitable that it is impossible to question his

veracity, any more than it would be to question our own lives, however bland or random they may seem while we are living them. When life is over, it becomes imbued with meaning. It was lived; that's enough. Using this fact, the author writes fine prose with great insight at a splendid pace.

When I knew Chip, in the early '60s, we were both living the same kind of life and having the same kind of struggle. We were both determined to exist without a job. We were both dedicated to our metier. With Marilyn, the three of us shared for a short while the bohemian days of the early '60s when all we could think of was finding the rent money for the end of the month. The two of them did their best to save my own failed novel. And to this day Chip makes me feel better about the fact that I bite my nails. —PETER HUTCHINSON

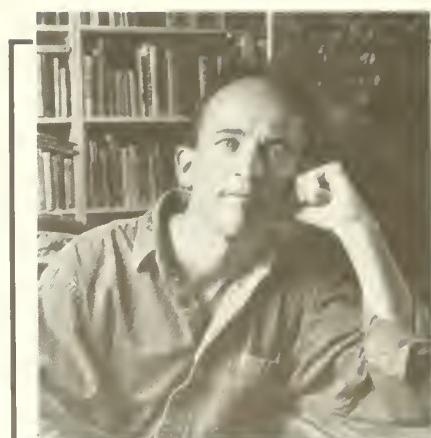
Peter Hutchinson, a conceptual and narrative artist, is having a retrospective this summer at the Provincetown Art Association & Museum. A collection of his selected writings, *Dissolving Clouds*, was recently published by the Provincetown Arts Press.

## Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep: An Anthology of Poetry by African Americans since 1945

Edited by Michael Harper and Anthony Walton  
LITTLE, BROWN

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK COMES FROM an old folk saying of the black South which finishes, "every goodbye ain't gone." Loosely translated it means, *don't count me out, don't believe I'm gone just because I seem to be gone*. It strikes me that the editors, Michael Harper and Anthony Walton, must have intended this title to suggest that the lush diversity of the poetry included has been and remains a fact of the American literary landscape, regardless of the fact that much of it has been ignored by most major publishing houses and, consequently, been relegated to invisible existence. Hopefully this carefully edited book marks an end of the exile to which many black poets have felt themselves consigned.

*Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep* features a wide range of voices, including lesser-known authors such as Gloria Oden and Melvin Dixon and nationally and internationally celebrated authors such as Derek Walcott, a Nobel Prize winner, and Rita Dove, America's current Poet Laureate. There is an ample showing of work concerned



Robert Giard

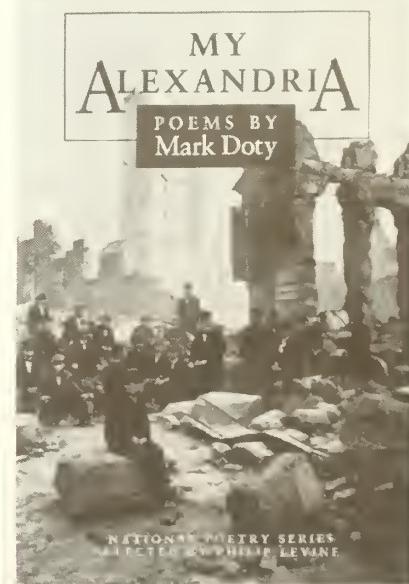
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with the socio-political plight of black Americans evenly mixed with deeply personal poems—often the poems of one author reveal a fascination with both dimensions.

Because of the *public* nature of the struggle of African Americans to find an empowered, unshackled place in American society, most anthologies of black poetry have given short shrift to writers whose work explored the less clearly political, more introspective complexities of a life. Poets, particularly those writing during the last 30 years starting with the Black Arts Movement of the '60s, found themselves pressed by both their own black communities and the interested white community to delineate the many levels of racist oppression and to articulate the demand for liberation. This often led to the exclusion of softer voices or those compelled to express delight in the colors of birds, as if the poetics of personal reverie or of delight in nature were exclusively the domain of white writers who, being free from the suffocating squeeze of racism, could afford the privilege of a *private vision*. This anthology unapologetically embraces both of these oft-considered opposites of expression, which is crucial. In doing so, it heralds the arrival of a vital wholeness, a healing of the wound in the African-American psyche that previously had been obliged to recognize its shape and value in largely socio-political terms.

The art of a particular group of people functions as a magnifying glass through which its culture might be examined and cherished, both from within and without, and the poems that make up this anthology stand collectively as a resonant witness of that struggle to understand and be understood. The history of the alienated African presence in America can be seen as a long, painstaking effort to shape a society that accepts and celebrates the full humanity of all peoples, even those whose traditions and physical features differ markedly from those of the majority. It can also be seen as an investigation of *freedom*. This labor is ongoing and, though the work toward this end is not strictly the domain of black Americans, it remains a defining feature of much that we do here. However, it would be stupid and tragic if this beautifully composed book were taken to be intended *primarily* for a black audience.

—TIM SEIBLES

Tim Seibles is the author of two books of poetry, *Body Moves* and *Hurdy-Gurdy*.

## What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics

by Adrienne Rich

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY

ADRIENNE RICH HAS BEEN ONE OF THE most popular and revered American poets since her first book, *A Change of Heart*, was selected by W.H. Auden for the prestigious Yale Series of Younger Poets in 1951. Whether or not you read poetry, once you read her latest collection of essays on poetry, you will be reminded, as the title of the book, via William Carlos Williams, tells us: "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there."

Early in her book, Rich is confronted with a blue heron on her neighbor's roof in Santa Cruz, California. This leads to a meditation on naming, which leads her to think about what a poem actually is. She describes a poem's origin as the crossing of trajectories of two (or more) elements that might not otherwise have known simultaneity, the result being that a piece of the universe is revealed as if for the first time. Thus, a poem can uncover desires and appetites buried under the accumulating emergencies of our lives, the fabricated wants and needs we had urged upon us, have accepted as our own.

This is a good description of Rich's own poems, as well as the poems written by the poets, both male and female, she admires. Her work also proves that "we're unable to write love, as we so much wish to do, without writing politics." Poetry, ignored by a large number of readers, isolated from a publishing industry increasingly concerned with the bottom line, is, she points out, lucky to be "clear of the fumes of how 'success' is concocted in the capitals of promotion, marketing, consumerism," and in particular of the "competition . . . that pushes the 'star' at the expense of the culture as a whole."

Knowing she lives in a society which does not reward its poets with notoriety or financial rewards, Rich searches for poetry in the malls and finds it on "two shelves down there," beneath the self-help section. But it is not these books, "uniformly designed and illustrated in a style conforming to everything else in the mall" in which "the verses, each occupying a single page, have short lines, make short declarative statements," that Rich is looking for. It is not that Rich is an elitist who mocks what most chain bookstores in the United States order and shelve as poetry. On the contrary. At a reading held in a performing space for Puerto Rican artists on New York's Lower East Side,

she finds what she yearns for: the "poems sounding like nothing but themselves," the poems written by those whose foothold in our culture cannot be taken for granted, those "legally" and "erotically at risk." Rich, because she needs to, searches for and finds the poet and the audience who write and read poetry as if his or her life depended on it, and in so doing unearths a poetic tradition pulsing through our contemporary culture, a passion that no lack of funding, no degree of misunderstanding or non-comprehension, can tame or deny. Making this invisible stream of fervent poetic discourse visible—making the unheard heard—is an integral triumph of *What Is Found There*.

Not surprisingly, in a chapter titled "Beginners," Rich locates the origins of the tradition in Whitman and Dickinson, the childless father and mother of our poetics—but highlighting not only their homosexual desires, but how their individual voices were shaped by the society that surrounded them, and how their place as a white man and a white woman of the time affected their awareness.

Then Rich, as critic, breaks free and places Muriel Rukeyser, "a woman who wrote—as a sexual woman and as a Jew—unapologetically, as the direct descendant of both Whitman and Dickinson, the central model of political poetic consciousness of our century. Rich's astute reading of Rukeyser, a poet who was "never literally lost," who during her lifetime "was a target of extraordinary hostility and ridicule, based on a critic's failure to read her well or even try to understand her methods," shows how during the conformist 1940s and 1950s Rukeyser was "too complicated and independent to follow any political 'line'" and "would not trim her sails to a vogue of poetic irony and wit, an aesthetics of the private middle-class life, an idea of what a woman's poetry should look like."

Rich asks how today one can reach Rukeyser, whose collected poems have been out of print and whose work when anthologized in college texts is preceded by "patronizing and ignorant commentary." It becomes apparent that not only will we reach poets like Rukeyser through "our need for her" but through books like *What Is Found There*.

Indeed, it is clear three-quarters through the book that Rich is forging a counter-text of her own. She skillfully leads us through the career and work of Minnie Bruce Pratt, "a transgressor mother" who received The Academy of American Poets' Lamont Poetry Prize for *Crimes against Nature*, published by the feminist Firebrand Press, a book centering on the poet's experience of losing custody of her two sons because she is a lesbian. As in Rukeyser's work overall, Rich finds in Pratt's an unevenness,

patches where the struggle to explain submerges the poetry. She understands why "Pratt deliberately breaks into colloquial prose, as if in despair with poetry" and how this failing derives from "the very nature of her undertaking: the desire, having ruptured a social web, broken a silence, to be heard, to communicate." But, Rich reminds us, "the communication of poetry takes place beyond the frameworks of explanation." "I want Pratt to trust the power of her most intense rhythms, her most inspired images," she writes.

And Rich takes us to the Lamont Awards ceremony at the Guggenheim Museum where not only two poetic styles, described by Ira Sadoff as "neo-formalism and the other dynamic, unsettling poetry," a ritual where two worlds, that of "white North American literary culture's discomfiture of politics and the sense of politics and culture as fused by the women's movement" (or in what Vaclav Havel has called the "second culture" or "parallel polis") collide. Rich's two-page description of that evening, her awareness of the clash between two different cultural realities in one society where new social forces are at work, is delectable. Her observations of the "fidgety-nervous or elaborately condescending behavior of the two Chancellors of the Academy on stage" when "faced with an undomesticated woman poet from the other culture" is unforgettable.

It is Rich, born of privilege and raised into politics, who can understand both these poetic worlds. It is not form that Rich despises but form for form's sake, form that seeks to control, form that seeks to constrain, to exclude. She uses June Jordan's sonnet written to Phyllis Wheatley and "De Amore Oscuro / Of Dark Love," the bilingual love sonnets of Francisco X. Alarcon, written to a young farm worker, as examples of how form can be used not to repress, but to express.

In her chapters documenting her own search for masters, Rich's eventual reading and new understanding of Wallace Stevens, whose collected poems she takes on a desert retreat to Joshua Tree National Monument, shows how Stevens' greatness and his attempt to find "a new knowledge of reality" (the last line in his collected poems), is left unfulfilled because of his acceptance, whether unconscious or conscious, of the question of class and race during his time.

What makes her reading of Stevens so poignant is that the messages "left along a trail" for the young poet that Rich was, when she had no means of fathoming how life and work as a woman poet would force her "to rethink ideas of order" surrounding and within her, have taken so long to be decoded, understood. Now in her mid-60s, when Rich questions the

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"ideas about scope and destiny, about the place of poetry in a life so unrealized, so vaguely aware, so conventional," she not only questions the life and work of Wallace Stevens, but her own work and its connections to her own life, as well. "I was to carry Stevens with me into places neither of us could have foreknown," she writes, "places as dense, implacable, and intricate as the desert at Joshua Tree" Sometimes it takes decades for the meanings of poetry, the meaning of a life, to surface. When it does we might be surprised at what we find there.

The underlying story of *What Is Found There* is that "a poet can be born in a house with empty bookshelves. Sooner or later, s/he will need books. But books are not genes." Rich's life and work has moved out from her enclosed upper middle-class existence of writing exquisitely intelligent poems, to the place where in this book she asks us to "imagine a society in which a strong arts program were integral elements of a free public education . . . a society in which, upon leaving schools, any worker was eligible, as a part of his or her worker's benefits, to attend free arts workshops, classes, retreats, both near the workplace and at weekend or summer camps." Her work and her life remind us that poetry is not a resting on the given, but a questing toward what might otherwise be.

If you haven't already done so, read the poems published in this magazine. Go to the local bookstore and buy this book by Adrienne Rich. Then, find a book of poems by Rich, or a poet Rich mentions in *What Is Found There*. Or those written by a friend you know who writes poems. The next time you encounter something that causes dissonance somewhere inside the private ecosystem that constitutes your body and your mind, take a deep breath, open your eyes, and begin to imagine.

—KENNY FRIES

Kenny Fries received the Gregory Kolovakos Award for AIDS Writing for his book of poems, *The Healing Notebooks* (Open Books, 1990). A new collection, *Anesthesia*, is forthcoming.

## The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery

by David Hevey

ROUTLEDGE

BRITISH PHOTOGRAPHER DAVID HEVEY traces the historical roots of the oppressive imaging of disablement and disabled persons in photography, but what distinguishes his book is that he takes us beyond the traditional view of victimization in which the critic who belongs to an oppressed group necessarily reiterates the centuries' long litany of wrongs. Instead he provides examples of contemporary empowerment which more accurately—and positively—portray those of us who are disabled.

His book provides a thorough base of understanding the movement away from the medical model which views disability as physical impairment toward the social model which sees disability in terms of the social condition of inaccessibility. This rejection of tragedy in favor of mobilization is the core of the disability-rights movement and is the key to repairing damage done to the disabled throughout history in the name of art. Even when the writing is too heavily laden with theory, Hevey never forgets the connection between civil rights and artistic depiction.

Hevey traces the tragic view of the disabled to Greek theater where the use of disabled people as the site of fear, loss or pity prevails. With Oedipus, Hevey shows those who enter non-disabled only to suffer a tragic fate when they challenge the state or order. And with those others who enter disabled, like Richard III, Hevey shows they are the embodiment of an audience's repressed fears for their own "fragile able-bodied state."

Charity advertising, the most visible contemporary arena of the impairment fixation, in which the fictional manifestation of fear within the viewer is aroused at the expense of the disabled, is painstakingly examined by Hevey. What makes this critique more painful is that the damage is done in the name of the very people that charity assumes its mission is to help. Indeed, as Hevey's analysis shows, many disabled people have lived their entire lives with notions of worthlessness that are fostered by the images of charity advertising. It is the highest statement of segregation, he writes, and it translates the actual segregation of disabled people into both a social and psychic reality by bonding the actual disablement of people with the psychic fear in non-disabled people of the loss and ownership of their bodies.

Charity advertising—examples are given in

the appendix—says in essence, “We know that your fears can hear us. You must give what you own in order not to get what they have.” Money is sought for cure, not care, the victim is blamed, and “beauty is warned of the beast.” Charity advertising, Hevey says, is the visual flagship for the myth of the tragedy of the impairment to which the non-disabled society looks to unburden its guilt and its “able-bodied” anxiety.

The real “tragic flaw” of disability representation is that the needs of the disabled become dependent on the charity organization, which becomes synonymous with the disablement itself. The Cerebral Palsy Association does not call itself the Inaccessible Stairs Charity. Charity advertising will not change until the charities and the advertising agencies employ more disabled people who are given the power and the voice to make decisions regarding fundraising and spending.

The representation of the disabled in art does not do much better. Hevey is most persuasive in his chapter entitled “The Enfreakment of Photography.” His readings of the work of Diane Arbus, Gary Winogrand, and Jean Mohr, included in the catalogue of the landmark “New Documents” exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in 1967, are much needed reevaluations of the pantheon of 1960s photography.

Hevey chides Susan Sontag, author of *On Photography*, and Patricia Bosworth, author of a biography of Diane Arbus, for not discussing the stages of Arbus’s representations of disabled people. Sontag accepts Arbus’s photographs of disabled people as a factual recording of the “pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive.” Neither Bosworth nor Arbus consider asking the subjects what they felt about the images in which they figured. Once again, Hevey reminds us, the entire discourse has absented the voice of those at its center—disabled people.

Hevey points out that this no progress at all. He discusses the “Family of Man” exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955, where the tucked-away disabled are photographically presented as a hidden blemish on the body of humanity. In the new reportage of photographers of the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Vietnam, disabled people were represented as the inconceivable birthmark of chaos, bedlam, and fear. Hevey ends this provocative chapter by telling us that contemporary photographers who have dealt with disablement, such as Joel-Peter Witkin, Gene Lambert, Bernard F. Stehle, and Nicholas Nixon, have continued in a manner which depressingly makes work by Arbus and Mohr seem positively timid.

In his closing chapters Hevey describes his

own development, and that of other disabled British photographers, of a process-oriented photography in which the disabled subject is clearly involved and not treated as a victim. He offers us a way out. He includes examples of his own work and that of Jo Spence, Jessica Evans, and Andy Golding. He weds political theory and artistic process in refreshing ways, challenging our notions of art and social change and moving the debate toward positive action.

—KENNY FRIES

Kenny Fries is a poet who is physically challenged.

## The American Woman in the Chinese Hat

by Carole Maso

DALKEY ARCHIVE PRESS

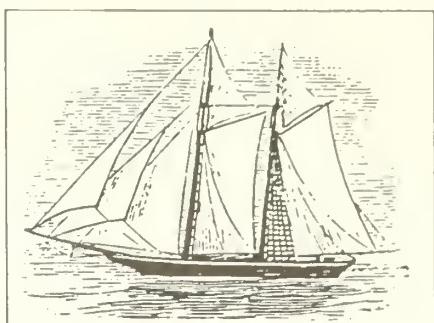


Carole Maso  
photo by Helen Lang

THOUGH THE LANDSCAPE OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN fiction has been dominated by psychological realism, some persist in writing the experimental novel, offering us work that endeavors to push the limits of the form. Kathy Acker, Susan Daitch, David Foster Wallace, and Robert Antoni spring to mind. Despite the fact that such work in recent years has been virtually ignored by the literary mainstream, these writers continue on their audacious path, upholding the post-modernistic intentions of Coover, Barth, Hawkes, and Pynchon. Carole Maso is another such writer, and her beautifully-rendered fourth novel, *The American Woman in the Chinese Hat*, will solidify her reputation.

The book is set on the Cote d’Azur, where Catherine, its American protagonist, has come to write. Catherine’s initial impressions of the region are evocative and painterly, even idealized, naive. She hopes that Lola, her lover of many years, will come to France, where they will “stay in a stone house with a red tile roof,”

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living on "olive oil and tomatoes, bread and figs, a few small fish." Then all at once her dream destructs: Lola informs her that she's found another lover. She's grown tired of Catherine's affairs, of living in deference to her talent. She explains that she needs "a break for a while."

Attempting to assuage her grief, Catherine embarks on an erotic odyssey, pursuing a series of affairs with a California poet, a young Arlesian, and a fascist who is a member of the French National Front. Her most surprising encounter takes place in a hotel room with three ticket-scalpers, two men and a woman, whom Catherine meets after a Michael Jackson concert. As the narrative progresses, she becomes more and more detached, observing her own puzzling behavior from afar. The book emerges with two points of view, first and third person, which shift randomly, depending on Catherine's emotional state. Ultimately, she becomes both character and author of her own experience.

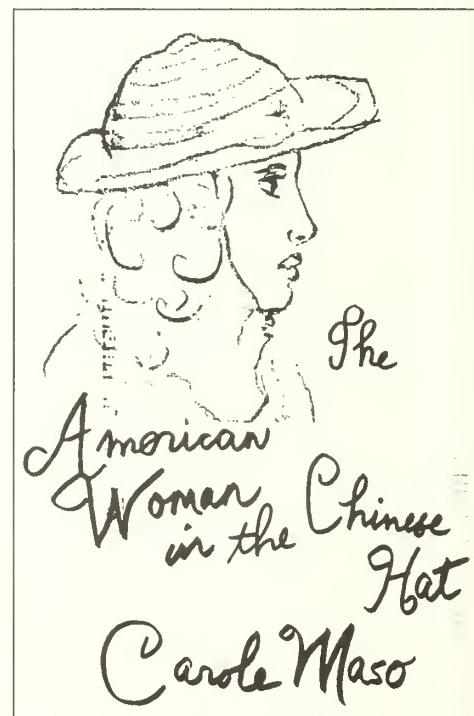
Then everything changes once she meets Lucien. With his intense eyes, his straight nose, and his "cheveux longs," the lonely, brooding Lucien represents, for Catherine, the idealized French male. His is "a beauty so perfect, so complete, that it makes all else seem inconsequential." They have an affair, the difficulties of which are compounded by their limited grasp of each others' language. As they become involved, Catherine attempts to develop a personal mythology of their relationship, hoping that the very act of storytelling will deliver them. "Tell me a story," Lucien says repeatedly, and Catherine complies, time and time again, describing in heightened language their initial meeting. But it's not enough to sustain, and she eventually gives up her belief in the power of words.

The most arresting passage of the novel, however, occurs when Catherine ruminates over her long-term relationship with Lola. The narrative here is charged, at times unbearably sad. Up until this point, Catherine only hints at their difficulties, but here we learn about all the factors that led to their break-up: Catherine's affairs, her occasional forays into mental illness, her complicated relationship to her work. With heartrending simplicity and directness, she admits her love to Lola:

But I have not forgotten, Lola, the fish or the road or the red sign we bled by. I have not forgotten your kindness or the way you helped me get out of bed. Or how so often the dark world seemed radiant in your presence.

The book lives for this chapter. It is the central *wound* of the novel, and it informs all that precedes and follows it.

Unlike Maso's previous novels *Ghost Dance*, *The Art Lover*, and *Ava*, *The American Woman in the Chinese Hat* employs a linear, almost conventional narrative. Thematically, it also departs from her other works in its steadfast refusal to uphold the notion that art is redemptive and necessary. *American Woman* is darker and more challenging, for it ultimately asserts the failure inherent in any organized attempt at communication. It is a book about writing a book, about the pitfalls of using one's experience as subject matter. Catherine looks upon Sylvia, an older woman with whom she has had a friendship, and realizes she has done her a "disservice." She has "turned her into a character," imposing "a false shape on her. She has diminished her in an attempt to understand." By the closing chapters of the book, when the linear narrative has all but exhausted itself, even the conventional thought-process breaks down. Paragraphs are no longer developed; simple images are repeated like antiphons. In the end there is no summing up, no attempt to justify, only mystery and the purity of music.



It is no mean feat to write a book about the failure of language. For if form is content, the challenge is to create a work that both embodies its premise and manages to be a satisfying, compelling work of art at the same time. A difficult task to be sure, but Carole Maso has succeeded admirably in a brave, sensuous tale that demands to be read.

—PAUL LISICKY

Paul Lisicky, a former fellow of the Fine Arts Work Center, has written two novels, *Bad Florida* and *Lawnboy*.

## Michael Klein Talks with **MARK DOTY**

*Continued from page 21*

**MK:** In this context, I guess, everything you've written since 1989 is about AIDS, wouldn't you say?

**MD:** Oh yes. Sometimes, many times the word is nowhere in sight, the expected details perhaps or the expected furniture of a poem about AIDS are nowhere in sight, but that is the dye in which the poem is steeped. It is the ground from which the poem begins. It's the condition of my life and I have no choice except to write out of it. I was really startled a few days ago when I got this review in the mail about *My Alexandria*—and I don't want to complain about reviews because I've had lots of very nice ones. But this particular reviewer said the poems weren't talking directly enough about AIDS. He said that there were many poems about people dying from an unnamed disease, as if I had to spell out those four letters and use the elements that he associates with AIDS in order to be talking about the reality. Or that I had to use the public definition of the disease in order to talk about it. It may be possible to see it more clearly without using those terms. There are poems that I have been unable to write because they are the more expected—the poems of being at the bedside. I don't think those are mine to write.

**MK:** Those bedside poems, I think, are almost always about visible AIDS.

**MD:** One of Wally's relatives said to me that she was very startled when it became clear that he didn't have very much longer to live because "he didn't look like a person with AIDS." And I said, well, what do you mean? She said, he wasn't emaciated and he didn't have lesions on his face. What she carried as a definition of AIDS was, of course, derived from the media, the image that had been given in the public discourse. The reviewer was doing the same thing. He was saying I was not reinscribing the discourse of AIDS that he had already read and therefore I was not talking about AIDS. Does anyone write about AIDS? It's a presumption I'm not sure I can make. I can write about loving Wally. I can write about my experience of what happened to him and what happened to me concurrently, but to write about AIDS is to write about the unknowable. Can you write about cancer? I suppose you can write about cancer as an agent in itself, but you would be much more likely to write about your own experience with it, in your own body or in the body of someone that you love.

**MK:** Do you think it's the same? Writing about AIDS and cancer?

**MD:** There are so many things we call AIDS. What I've experienced as a gay man of that dev-

astation in my culture, the way the epidemic exists at an intersection of desire and contagion, is particularly loaded and powerful. But what AIDS is in the IV-drug community is one thing. What AIDS is in Africa is another. I go back to thinking that AIDS is an acronym, cancer is a word. What cancer means culturally may not be quite as ambiguous.

**MK:** I think that intersection between desire and contagion is what makes AIDS different from cancer.

**MD:** What AIDS means culturally is enormously problematic and I don't think I have written about that except by implication. And maybe in "Tiara," a poem that takes on a perception about AIDS that we've all heard and attempts to turn it on its ear and redeem it in some way. I think that I've written about queer identity in a way that's quite politicized—poems that speak to the dignity, again, of drag queens, as extreme representatives of queer identity—poems that speak to the value and dignity of desire. But I will admit that those were easier poems to write.

**MK:** Do you see your queer identity poems changing?

**MD:** Yes, actually I have a new poem that's a rant. I'm sort of excited about it. I was in Providence walking around and I saw a poster on the walls of this boarded up old movie palace which was a xeroxed "photograph" of a face of Jesus and scrawled under it in magic marker was "Homo will not inherit, Repent and be saved." And I found that phrase, "Homo will not inherit," coming up in my head again and again. I kept trying to avoid writing the poem and then I said, all right I'm going to do it and wrote a poem spoken to the Christian Right that is a speech about the beauty of desire, and the absurdity of "inheriting the kingdom." I think I've gotten a little more in your face. In Wayne Koestenbaum's book *The Queen's Throat*, he talks about the diva—that diva-dom has nothing to do with one's gender, that it's an attitude, a kind of fabulosity, a grand vocal performance. And I find myself writing poems that are more the poems of a grand queen. There's a poem in this new manuscript called "Couture" which is a celebration of the gowns in old master paintings—that's half the poem. The other half of the poem talks about autumn foliage as a drag costume, the woods getting themselves up in these gowns. It's a very heightened, lavish, over-the-top poem that feels to me like singing an aria. It's a more pronounced aspect of my queer character, written out directly.

**MK:** Shifting gears here, can you talk a little about your move to Provincetown?

**MD:** One of the reasons was certainly Wally's

HIV status. To be in Vermont, particularly where we lived, and to be HIV-positive was potentially very isolating and we were concerned that if Wally got sick there wasn't going to be help for us. It was going to be lonely and difficult and there were no support services, no help. We wanted to be in a place where there was more of an HIV community, and we also wanted to set down the struggle of being the only "out" male couple in our town, a town of 8,000 people! We knew other gay men, but they were either single or in the closet or married. That was taking a lot of our energy. Coming to Provincetown was a way of giving ourselves a gift and I haven't regretted that decision for a minute. It was exactly the right thing to do. We could set down some burdens and have a world around Wally during the last years of his life that felt safe and welcoming and loving to him. It helped us both a great deal. Of course, we could also put on wigs in Provincetown. I believe you saw me at the Halloween party doing my Stevie Nicks look-alike act?

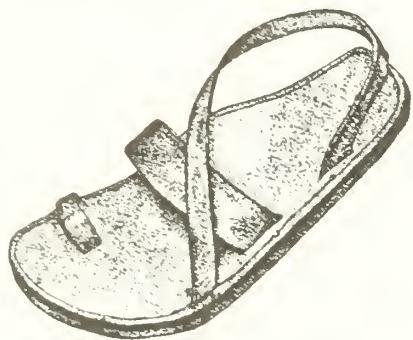
**MK:** Yes—most fabulous.

**MD:** I love to do drag, even though I don't do it often. A very different part of my personality emerges. I get very social, witty, fast, flirtatious, a little bitchy. She's somebody else and I like her a lot. I actually slip into some of that self now without changing my clothes because you don't need clothes to be a different person, although they do help!

**MK:** Has Provincetown been like any other place for you?

**MD:** One thing that it does is take me back to some of my growing up in southern Arizona, which is a very elemental landscape, like this one, both very austere and very alive simultaneously. I feel at home. In the marsh or in the dunes there is so little, yet so very much that is intensely itself and available. And those huge, wide-open horizontals, the endlessly shifting light. My Vermont experience left me wildly hungry for light and this place offers one centuries of light. And, if this town is not about permission, what is it about? After we had lived here for a few months, Wally and I were walking on the beach and a couple of men came up very close behind us. There were these loud footsteps getting closer and closer and I felt myself get really tight in my chest, starting to feel afraid, and I turned around prepared to defend myself—and they were holding hands. That made me see how much fear I was carrying around that was completely mine. Nobody was making me feel fear now. I had brought it with me and now I had the opportunity to start to set it down. Fear and tension is something

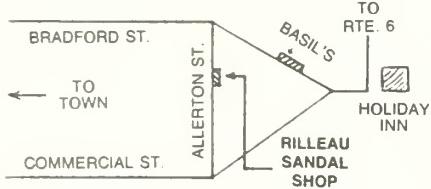
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that is always in the way of creativity. The less fear and tension you hold, the more you're able to respond to your experience, to respond freely and openly. I feel a permission here for my day-dreams, too. Susan Mitchell has that wonderful essay about Provincetown, "Dreaming in Public," a very appropriate phrase about this town because I can be in my state of reverie pretty much wherever I am and people just seem to let me do that.

MK: Like Susan Mitchell, I know that you teach and are great at it and have been doing it for a long time. It also seems to be something that doesn't—unlike other writers I know—affect your work too much. You manage to get a lot of work done. Or does it feel like you're not getting enough work done? How do you negotiate between writing and teaching and what is it that you teach? What do you teach writers?

MD: I know how to do it, but I don't know how to describe what it is that I'm doing. It's a good thing the dean doesn't ask me these questions. When I'm teaching I write less, in the sense of going to my desk and spending a long time looking at what I am doing. But I seem to always be scribbling in my notebook, no matter what. And though I have less time when I teach, I find that the essential things get written down and I can work with them later. When I teach, I don't finish things. I can get them started. I get the key phrases and bits and pieces and later I find I can open that material more and complete it. When I have taught composition or had many non-resident students with whom I was corresponding, I have found that teaching could interfere because I would be exhausted and weary of words. But I've been blessed the last four years at Sarah Lawrence because I have only taught poetry workshops and to me that is like being paid to have a conversation that I would have anyway. I'm given the opportunity to have these interesting and lively students to talk with. Much of what I do has very little to do with imparting information. People can go look that up. I think that people need to be witnessed. We have this profound, human longing to be seen for who we are, which is—and this relates to what we were talking about earlier—to be seen in our dignity, in what is of value to us and can be cherished about us. I try to witness where each student is and take the poems I am given and listen to them closely and say to the student: here is what I see you doing; this is what seems to me to be the question that you're asking or where you're struggling. I try to listen carefully and reflect back what I'm hearing, and then ask questions about it. I also point to possibilities for reading, which is an essential part of the teacher's work. The process of becoming an artist is ambiguous and mysterious and indirect. We know that you can't take poems by X and give some suggestions and X will then be a better poet. But I know that my work as a writer

was furthered by finding those people and poems with whom I have a kinship. A lot of young people have no idea where to begin. They pick up something that doesn't speak to them, then abandon the project. I try to steer people to their poets. I try to help them think about the nature of their project and the questions they are struggling to solve.

MK: Since I've been teaching at Goddard, I've found that the students have a hard time talking about what they're reading, which makes me think it's because it might have little to do with their experiential life.

MD: Younger writers often have such a tremendous need to tell their own story that it's very difficult for them to pay attention to things outside of that story. Perhaps at that age, more than any other, maybe that's when you're reading for mirrors. You're looking for reflections of yourself and where you cannot see a reflection of yourself, you can't see, period. That was true for me when I was 20. I didn't know how to read. I didn't have a clue about how to read a poem, although I tried. I would look at poems and sort of have reveries about them.

MK: Is teaching something you wanted to do?

MD: I always look forward to teaching. There is an energy present with people as they figure out ways of telling their stories. Teaching has always felt to me like privileged work. Like anybody, I've felt really beaten down at times, teaching five composition courses, struggling to make a living. And there are times when I've also fallen prey to what I think is the worst hazard of teaching—becoming canned and responding in programmed ways because you've responded to the same thing so many times or you get tired and you're not able to be present with what's happening right now. That's the part of teaching that is the most difficult. It's also the part that will help to keep you alive as a writer. If you can be there with the person that you're with, paying attention rather than saying the thing you say to a sophomore who uses too many abstractions, if you can really listen to this particular student who has a desire to talk about this and to find her own way of doing that, you can stay fresh. For most teachers, because of the demands of the institutions in which they teach, that freshness, or quality of attention, gets drummed out. You just get too worn out—having classes with too many students in them or doing it over and over again. At Sarah Lawrence I teach only small groups and I see every student for an individual conference every other week, so these people really emerge as people with very unique esthetic directions and struggles and that is always pushing me.

MK: When I visited Sarah Lawrence I was astonished at how the students were already real writers.

MD: Yes, isn't that something. There are people

who are living a writing life, in that their writing becomes the place in which they encounter themselves and that without it, they don't have a way of finding and locating their experience. And the community allows that to be a real center of value. It's one of the few places I can think of where it is not unusual to be a poet and where being a poet is a respected way of operating in the world. So you meet quite young students who have a habit of identity and that's very rare. I see 20-year-olds who can say, "I am a poet," without apologizing or feeling self-conscious or becoming self-deprecatory. Instead, in a humble, serious way, they have found their way towards being able to claim the title.

**MK:** Besides writing poetry, you're also writing essays.

**MD:** There was a time when I wanted to write fiction and I think really failed thoroughly at it, so my teachers told me, and steered me away from it. The piece of truth in what my teachers had to say was that I needed to focus. I was trying to write poetry, I was trying to write fiction, and I needed to pour all my energy into the poems, which came first in my heart. Later, I found that the things I wanted to do in fiction, I could do in poems. I could build characters. I could use dialogue. I could have extended sequences in time. Many fictional devices became, in fact, things that were crucial to me in structuring poems. So my experience as a frustrated fiction writer informed the kind of narrative poems I was writing, which I've since moved away from. Rather than story telling, my poems feel to me increasingly meditative and song-like. But essays give me a different kind of permission. In prose I feel there are so many words that I can't possibly control them all. I will never get it absolutely right in the way I can almost get a poem right, or fool myself into thinking I can. Rather than become frustrated in prose, I give up and acknowledge that there are all kinds of ways I could do this, but I'm going to do it this way.

**MK:** How is the poem different from the essay?

**MD:** The personal essay is a different kind of arena than the poem. For instance, it's been almost six weeks since Wally died and I have not begun to write a poem, I couldn't, but I wrote an essay. I could put those sentences together and one sentence would follow another and it was affirming and exhilarating. When I write prose, there's a relaxation of attention, a feeling that I can ramble. I know this is an illusion, but I somehow don't feel the same sense of responsibility, as if it would be fine to write irresponsible prose, which certainly isn't true. But maybe the feeling of responsibility comes from the fact that I take myself seriously as a poet and I feel like I am ultimately responsible for those poems. As a prose writer, because I don't have the same kind of level of skill in the form, I don't feel anybody else is going to take my prose all

that seriously, or at least, I hope they won't. Later I'll go back and I'll question what I've written and I'll edit it and get more serious about it, but there is this freedom about it. I feel like if I went to write a poem now, I would have to rise to talking about what's happened to me, which is the most profound thing that's ever happened to me in my life. You and I were talking previously about this sense of a watershed and I do feel like everything in my life moved towards six weeks ago and Wally's death. After that event, I am changed. Usually, when I feel too overwhelmed by something to be able to write about it, I find myself turning to metaphor. Rather than speaking directly, I can come at it indirectly. Now, I'm in too fluid a state to even be able to employ metaphor in a focused way. My attention shifts a lot.

**MK:** Being witness to your life this past year, I am stunned that professionally you've never had a better year and personally you've never had more grief.

**MD:** I felt that my public life was very much heightened and intensified and my private life was incredibly heightened and intensified.

**MK:** So that private and public life actually had more in common than one might think.

**MD:** It was terrible, it was not all terrible. Maybe the world is never all terrible. There were ways in which Wally really became more and more purely himself while other things were stripped away, leaving that beautiful, shining spirit—very boyish and very loving and very present. It was wonderful to be around. What could have happened instead? Many people find themselves isolated, alone, or go through a great deal of physical pain or spend a lot of time in hospitals at the mercy of strangers. Wally was able to be at home all the time and it was wonderful to be allowed to carry him and be part of a group of people who were carrying him through that time. Through his own acceptance, he made it easy for other people. He would be frustrated for five minutes or he would sort of sigh because he couldn't get up and walk. A minute later he would be making a joke or teasing somebody, enjoying his life, remarkably, until the very last minute. And when he stopped being able to enjoy being in his body, he left. I have this beautiful photograph I took of him smiling on Thursday night, just grinning away, and I didn't know then that was the last time he would be able to smile that much. It doesn't look like a photograph of somebody who's going to die in two days.

**MK:** How did Wally respond to all your success and awards?

**MD:** He was very proud about all the public stuff. The only hard thing for me about not winning the National Book Award was having to call him from the Plaza and tell him. Everybody else saw that it wasn't black and white, and that in fact to be nominated, for a poet, is just a great thing

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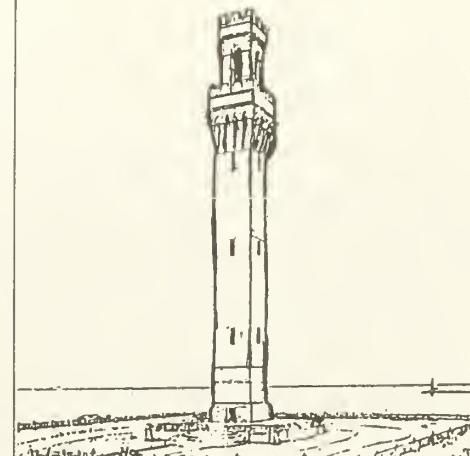
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and that of course, this very accomplished, older poet was going to win the prize. But Wally didn't see it that way. He just wanted me to win and that's all. He was so pleased about the recognition my work was getting and I think it represented for him, and I guess for both of us, a kind of on-goingness in my life—that after being with him, and taking care of him, there was something else for me to move into.

MK: What has your response been?

MD: I'm truly amazed to have readers who really have paid attention to the book. People who have themselves lost friends or lovers or who have experiences which resonate with the poems have written me letters with such openness and generosity that I absolutely had to

I think that people need to be witnessed. We have this profound, human longing to be seen for who we are, which is—and this relates to what we were talking about earlier—to be seen in our dignity, in what is of value to us and can be cherished about us.

believe them. It's very easy for me to not let praise in because it conflicts with the opinion I tend to have of myself. But when somebody tells you their own story because of the way they have been touched

by what you have written, you have an undeniable sense of having company in the world.

MK: Are students part of that company?

MD: I guess I knew about students what I didn't know about myself. I wanted to be witnessed. At Wally's service, people spoke about what they had seen between the two of us, and I felt known. A few weeks ago I wrote an introduction for a reading that Jean Valentine gave at the Fine Arts Work Center. Jean has a way of approaching the world and constructing language which simply could not be anyone else's way. Style is too small a word for it. One can feel its presence on the page, how it has been earned through a long process of becoming oneself, saying, this is not me, this is not me, this is not me, *this*, that which is left, is who I am. In my introduction I said, isn't that what we all want, to be unmistakable? I didn't realize that's what we mean by recognition. Recognition is not somebody hanging a medal around your neck or giving you a grant or publishing your book. Recognition is being seen.

MK: Your new manuscript is close to finished?

MD: Very close to finished. I have a feeling that what's left is mostly word choice and looking at how many times I've used the word "shimmer."

MK: Shimmer?

MD: Because the book is largely set in Provincetown, it's full of gleaming, shimmering, rippling, undulations of light.

MK: "Undulation" is a word you use more than any poet I know. How is your poetry changing?

MD: There's an increasing engagement with formality of language, an increasing musicality. I've gotten much more concerned with the sheer fabric of language as a surface in itself and, therefore, there is much more play with versions of traditional form, with rhyme and blank verse, very loose kinds of metrical and syllabic structures and so on. I am not a formalist in the sense of having a real allegiance to fixed forms, but I am very interested in the tension between pattern and free speech, between form and freedom of expression. The real poem seems to live in the tension between those polarities. The real poem is not in the sonnet's form nor in the mere spilling out of your mind. It's in the shuttling dialogue between statement and music.

MK: As a writer, what lesson or well do you return to?

MD: The teachers who shaped my writing were poets I met through their work. One was James L. White, who is best known for a remarkable posthumous book called *The Salt Ecstasies*, published in the early '80s. He took some mannerisms of deep image poetry—the powerful and striking image—and allied that with a very heart-centered intensity, a great sadness, a great will to be loved and a real doubt that love was possible. He was the first poet who spoke to me as a gay man of the possibility of giving my own life its full resonance. His ways of thinking about memory were marvelously helpful. Some poets became teachers to me because they went so fully into their way of making meaning that they made a way of knowing the world. By becoming unmistakably individual, their work became a vehicle for encountering anything.

MK: As Elizabeth Bishop has done.

MD: Here's a poet who is basically shy, quite reserved about telling you very much about her life. Her particular interest is simply in describing things. She wants to do the most accurate description that she can of what's in front of her, but she pours her personality, her self-ness, her own quality of attention, her soul, so profoundly into her description that it is not just description anymore, it's self-portrait. The way she perceives is so completely stamped on the poems, they could be written by nobody else. That way of perception becomes something that a reader can step into. We are invited to see the world through her eyes and, as we were saying earlier about things that are Cavafian, we can now say that there are experiences or moments that are Bishopian, where you feel like you're living in an Elizabeth Bishop poem. Frank Bidart is another poet whose work has that kind of stamp of extreme individuality. He moves

through his obsessions relentlessly focused, allowing nothing in except the examination of that obsessive territory, and he makes out of it a place that you just can't get out of once you get in.

MK: Where are you in the process of becoming nobody but yourself?

MD: My guess is that we can never really answer that about ourselves. You know yourself in mirrors, by how you see other things. It's very hard for me to say cogent things about my own poems. I can talk about one poem at a time, but trying to think about it as a poetry. . . . It seems I've been given permission to be who I am. When I do that, people listen to me. I guess that's a lesson of this year.

MK: What advice would you give to young poets?

MD: Find your ways to balance faith and doubt, which I think are both our allies, ultimately. More writers in the process of trying to become themselves are immobilized by doubt than by anything else. Very few of us have too much faith. It doesn't seem to be characteristic of the breed. We seem, instead, to be very good at internalizing the message we've gotten from outside of not valuing ourselves. We have to find ways to believe in ourselves enough to do the work. The only way I know of proceeding is to do your work, make things, and then to look at them and make them better or make the next thing. To keep making, you have to have enough faith. You also have to be able to make use of your doubt, because it will not abandon you. Since your doubt will not go away, as Rilke says in *Letters to a Young Poet*, it must become your ally. That means bringing your doubt in at the right time, at the place where it can help you question what you've done. Ultimately, there is no advice to give to young artists except keep working. If you listen to your work, if you live in it, it will deliver you to its destination. Abraham Maslow says somewhere, "every is contains its *ought*." In that gestating poem you're making there is the kernel of the poem it could become. Here is the poem that it ought to be. In heaven, maybe it already is. But the act of translation, or the process of getting to heaven, requires the practice of living in your work. ■

**MICHAEL KLEIN**'s first book of poetry, 1990, published by Provincetown Arts Press, recently won a Lambda Literary Award in Poetry. He is the editor, with Marie Howe, of *In the Company of My Solitude: Writing from the AIDS Pandemic*, forthcoming this winter from Persea Books. He is performing his poem for theater, *10,000 Hands Have Touched Me*, at the Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater this summer. This fall he begins teaching at Sarah Lawrence College.

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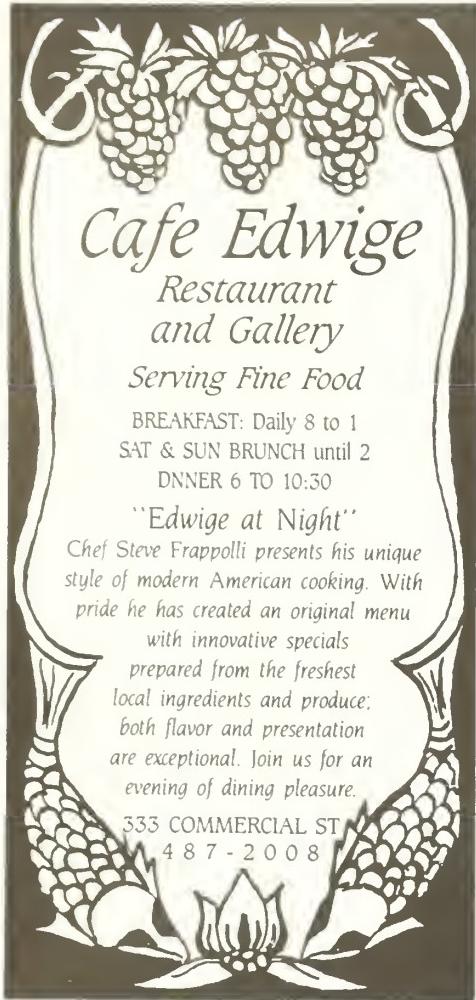
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“The Lobster Pot Cookbook” \$9.95

breakfast, lunch and dinner; luscious homemade desserts. Catering is available by the Private Chef. About a 10 minute walk from town center; parking can be tricky in season, though there's limited parking available in back in the evening.

**MARTIN HOUSE** • 487-1327 • Seasonal Located in a meticulously restored 18th century building right next to the Boatslip, the Martin House, owned and operated by the Martin family, has gained a reputation for serving a sumptuous selection of food prepared from scratch, featuring fresh seafood, vegetarian specialties, free-range poultry, duck, pork, native lamb, and Angus beef. Also serving a gourmet breakfast from 9 a.m., Sunday brunch until 2 p.m. Dining rooms open onto a delightful brick terrace with rose arbors and herb garden overlooking the bay.

**BOATSLIP** • 487-2509 • Seasonal This is the first year for Paul St. Martin at the well-known Boatslip Restaurant, an elegant space at the Boatslip Motel—home of the Tea Dance—which has a magnificent view of the Bay. Paul's menu features international seafood dishes, a large appetizer selection, and a “lighter fare” menu. Works by local artists are displayed on the walls. Open for breakfast and dinner.

**BUBALA'S BY THE BAY** • 487-0773 Bubala's has moved to the former location of the Sea View restaurant after a successful first season last year at Cafe Edwige. Restaurant veterans Rose Kennedy and Noreen Bahring have taken on the challenge of updating this large, airy space, newly renovated with a huge mural by James Hansen, and are offering extensive menus for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and late fare until midnight. Lively bar; fabulous waterfront location.

# Red Inn

Provincetown's historic Inn on the waterfront, built in 1805, is located on the beach where the Pilgrims first set foot in the New World. Today the charm and elegance of the Federalist Period have been restored affording you a vacation experience unsurpassed in Provincetown.

**BRUNCH & LUNCH**  
11-3 o'clock

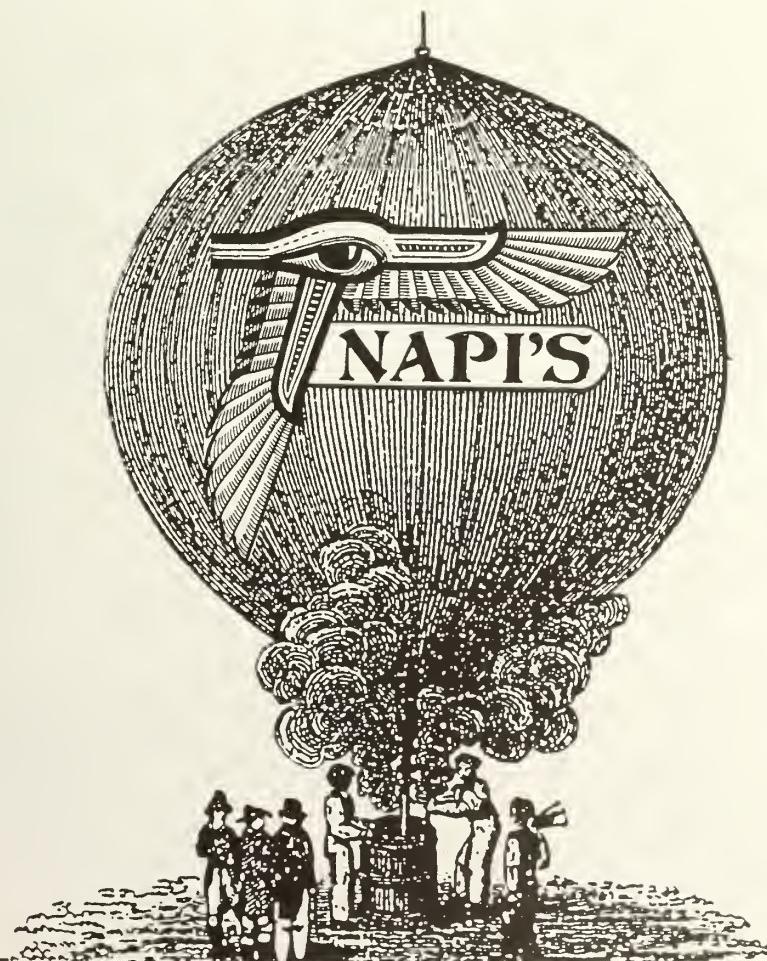
**DINNER**  
from 6 o'clock on  
RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

#### LOGGING

Each room and apartment is directly on the waterfront and has private bath, telephone, television. All are decorated with fine antiques and original works of art.

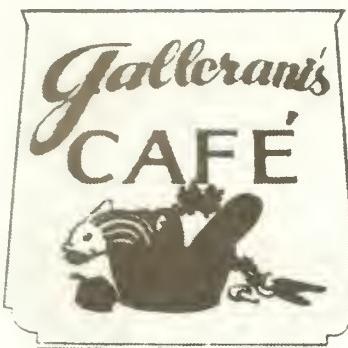
*Ample parking in our lot in the quiet West End*  
**OPEN ALL YEAR**

15 Commercial Street • Provincetown  
487-0050



Provincetown's  
most unusual  
restaurant,  
serving the  
very finest of  
international,  
local, and  
vegetarian  
dishes.

7 FREEMAN ST.  
PROVINCETOWN, MA  
487-1145



*"A good rule of thumb in a resort town, even off season, is to eat where the residents do.*

*In Provincetown,  
this means going to  
Gallerani's Café,  
a kitschy old storefront  
at the western end of town.  
Whether you go for breakfast  
in the off-season (omelettes,  
pepper-laden home-fries),  
or dinner any time of the year  
(baked oysters with sour cream,  
caviar, and salmon or beef with  
roasted peppers, mozzarella, and  
mustard cream sauce), you'll  
finally feel like you have found  
the kind of place you've been  
searching for."*

NEW ENGLAND MONTHLY  
MAY 1990

#### DINNER

from 6:00 p.m.  
5:30 p.m. on weekends

133 Commercial Street  
Provincetown  
487-4433

*Evening free parking in Flyer's Boat Yard  
(rear of building)*

Catering available by The Private Chef

#### SPIRITUS • 487-2808

Serving the best pizza in town, plus Haagen Daaz ice cream. Eat out front and observe the activity in the street, or indoor at booths—or, in warm weather, enjoy the outdoor garden at the back. Popular with the bar crowd, it's open late, *après bar*—the scene of "the scene."

— Town Center —

#### CAFÉ HEAVEN • 487-9639

A popular cafe which has proved to be a welcome addition to Provincetown's repertoire of fine eateries. Breakfast is served all day; open for lunch and dinner, too. Ham, roast beef and turkey are freshly baked on the premises, and all desserts are homemade, using lots of seasonal fruits. Full service bar. Display of paintings by John Grillo.

#### FRONT STREET • 487-9715 • Long Season

A romantic and elegant bistro located in the brick cellar of a Victorian mansion, Front Street has a well-earned reputation as one of Provincetown's finest restaurants. Chef/owner Donna Aliperti provides an intriguing change of menu weekly, featuring continental cuisine prepared with the finest ingredients, complemented by an extensive wine list. Menu of Italian cuisine also available. Dinner until 11, bar until 1:00 a.m.

#### FLANNERY'S • 487-1430 • Seasonal

At the Crown & Anchor overlooking the beach, Flannery's features fresh local seafood—specialties include Clambakes, Fisherman's Platter, and Surf & Turf, with scallops or shrimp. Lunch daily, 12–4:30, Dinner Thurs., Fri. & Sat., 5:30–9:00.

#### VORELLI'S • 487-2778 • Seasonal

With leaded glass, antique light shades, and an abundance of polished brass, Vorelli's has the atmosphere of an old pub. Secluded mahogany booths are perfect for intimate dining. Serving

**CAFE HEAVEN**

Stellar coffees and breakfast all day, fresh sun-ripened fruit juices, celestial salads, heavenly hamburgers and a star-studded choice of spirits.

487-9639  
199 Commercial Street

CREATIVE  
food ARTfully  
PRESENTED IN  
A TASTEFUL  
WATERFRONT  
SETTING IN  
THE EAST END  
GALLERY  
district

SERVING BRUNCH  
AND DINNER



429 COMMERCIAL  
487-1500

# Basil's

*Discover Basil's  
casual country atmosphere*

*featuring:*

Char-broiled Prime Meats

Local Fresh Seafood

Vegetarian Specialties

*all served with salad bar,  
homemade Portuguese rolls,  
and choice of potato or rice*

Early Bird Specials from 5-7 p.m.

**BREAKFAST** from 8:00 a.m.

**LUNCH** from 12 noon

**DINNER** from 5:00 p.m.

350 Bradford Street  
in the Far East End

- PLENTY OF FREE PARKING -

4 8 7 - 3 3 6 8

charcoal-broiled steaks, swordfish and salmon; steamed lobster; Italian specialties—all in generous helpings. Right on Commercial Street opposite Seamen's Bank at Town Center.

**EURO ISLAND GRILL • 487-2505**

Once a church, then a movie theater, the Euro Island Grill has a style all its own. Exuding tropical charm, the Euro dishes up a unique blend of Caribbean and Mediterranean flavors. Enjoy breakfast, lunch or dinner outside on the outdoor patio one floor up overlooking Commercial Street, right next to Town Hall. Serving all day long; dinner until 10:30, light fare until 2 a.m. Live entertainment—jazz, blues and reggae groups—at Club Euro throughout the season. Open May through October. A fun place!

**AUSTIN'S • 487-3304 • Seasonal**

In the charming building off a courtyard on Bradford Street which was occupied by Franco's last season is an exciting new restaurant serving "California Cuisine." The daily menu offers delicious grilled entrees and a wide selection of appetizers, all prepared with the freshest ingredients. Drinks, appetizers and desserts served upstairs in the bar until 1 p.m.

**MOJO's • 487-3140 • Seasonal**

Mojo's is as close as you can get to gourmet fast food. Try homemade fried potatoes (with skins on), batter-fried mushrooms, fresh seafood sandwiches and platters, homemade chili, humus salad with sprouts. Eat at outdoor tables, or stroll across to the beach and enjoy your feast watching the fishing boats come and go. Efficient and friendly service. Open from 11 a.m. to midnight.

**NAPI'S • 487-1145 • Open Year Round**

Dubbed "Provincetown's most unusual restaurant," Napi's certainly has plenty on which

# VORELLI'S

Restaurant



**Provincetown's Italian  
and Steakhouse Restaurant**

**From the Char Grill**

12 oz. Sirloin Strip • 8 oz. Filet Mignon

10 oz. Top Sirloin

Salmon Filets • Swordfish Steaks

**Veal Favorites**

Veal Parmigiana • Veal Marsala

Veal and Prosciutto

**Pasta • Pasta • Pasta**

All your favorite pasta creations!

Lobster, Shrimp, Scallops, Clams  
Sautéed and served over pasta

**Salads**

Caesar Salad • Chicken Caesar

Shrimp Caesar • Calamari Salad

**487-2778 • 226 Commercial Street**

Provincetown's most romantic waterfront restaurant  
serving the freshest local seafood and grilled specialties

*Now under the ownership  
and management of  
Napi & Moe  
Van Dereck*



**THE FLAGSHIP • 463 COMMERCIAL STREET • PROVINCETOWN • 487-4200**



# AUSTIN'S

california cuisine

133 Bradford St  
Provincetown  
508-487-3304

exceptional  
fresh  
delicious  
wholesome  
virtues  
velvety  
like a dream  
illuminating  
to savor  
scented with the aromas  
lavish  
simple  
rich  
wonderful  
luxurious  
to enjoy  
grant  
marvelous  
perfect!

A fine dining

to feast the eye as well as the palate. Owners Napi and Helen van Dereck have embellished their restaurant, built by Napi himself, with items from their extensive collection of Provincetown art and artifacts. The food is as unusual as the surroundings, featuring international, local and vegetarian cuisine, all prepared to the highest standards by Helen. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner off-season, dinner ONLY in season.

### GOVERNOR BRADFORD • 487-9618

On the corner of Commercial Street and Standish Streets at the center of town, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, with patio for cocktails and outdoor dining. Karaoke shows and live entertainment in the bar, as well as chess and backgammon tables, all make it a popular gathering place. The bar downstairs features the town's largest game room with pinball, pool tables and video games.

### LOBSTER POT • 487-0842 • Open all year

Owned and managed by the McNulty family, this bustling restaurant serves some of the best fresh seafood in town in a no-nonsense atmosphere where the main feature is what comes out of the kitchen. The service is friendly and efficient, so even when it's crowded, things run smoothly. Chef Tim McNulty's clam chowder won the Cape Cod Chowder Contest four years running. Try a cocktail at the "Top of the Pot," the second floor bar and outside deck with fabulous view of the harbor and fishing boats. Be prepared to stand in line on busy nights, but the wait is well worth it. Just around the corner from Town Wharf, you can't miss the red neon lobster signs. Buy the *Lobster Pot Cookbook*—\$9.95.

## CLUB EURO

— eat to the beat —



Indoor Bar with Pool Tables, Large Screen  
Music Videos & Sporting Events

breakfast • lunch • dinner • late night menu

OPEN 9 am 'til 1 am

PLUS LIVE MUSIC: BEATS INTERNATIONALE—WORLD MUSIC

258 commercial street • provincetown • next to town hall • 487-2505

"The taste of the islands  
on Cape Cod" featuring  
the Euro's famous summer  
menu and  
frozen Island drinks  
at the Tiki Bar.

Indoor & Outdoor Dining on  
our large semi-covered deck

### Meet your friends at **PAPARAZZI** A very special restaurant on the Bay

- Jumbo Prime Rib
  - Local Seafood & Lobster
  - Rib & Seafood Combos
  - Italian Specialties
  - Blackboard Specials
- PLUS
- Pizza • Munchies • Appetizers  
all entrees include Cape Cod's famous  
Chef's Soup and Salad Bar  
— special menu for juniors & seniors —

### BREAKFAST • LUNCH • DINNER

### WINE • BEER • COCKTAILS

All menu items available for Take-Out  
Daily Breakfast Buffet in Season

**487-PAPA (7272) or 487-2658**  
Route 6A, Beach Point, N. Truro

BAYVIEW DINING IN AN  
INFORMAL FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

**CAFE BLASE** • 487-9465 • Seasonal  
The Town's most picturesque outdoor cafe, with pink and blue umbrellas, multi-colored paper lampshades gently swaying in the breeze, and colorful annuals in windowboxes abounding. The food is a touch more sophisticated than the usual with a definite European flair. A perfect place to sit in the sun, people-watching, sipping a cool drink, or reading the Sunday papers; you'll also have the best view of the July 4th parade. On Commercial Street next to the Town Library.

**CAFE EDWIGE** • 487-2008 • Seasonal  
The most popular breakfast place in town, with good reason: sample granola, omelettes, fresh fruit, fresh-squeezed juices, frittatas, tortillas, garden salads, pancakes, fresh-baked Danish pastries, and more. In the evenings, Cafe Edwige transforms into "Edwige at Night" when Chef Steve Frappolli presents his unique style of modern American cooking featuring the finest of fresh natural foods. Weekend brunch until 2 p.m. Upstairs at 333 Commercial St., across from the Library.

**BOX LUNCH** • 487-6026 • Seasonal  
A Cape Cod institution—Box Lunch started in Wellfleet and now has seven other locations—Box Lunch sandwiches ("Rollwiches") have to be eaten to be believed. You'll find no wedges of white bread here—Rollwiches are stuffed to the gills with imaginative variations of choice ingredients and rolled up in pita bread. One sandwich is a meal—phone in your order ahead.

"The best seafood in all New England"



— Since 1967 —  
Waterfront Dining

BREAKFAST • LUNCH • DINNER • OUTDOOR CAFE

*Enjoy Lunch on our Top Deck*

371 COMMERCIAL STREET • PROVINCETOWN • 487-0670

# BABE'S

Restaurant & Bakery

## BREAKFAST

7:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.

## DINNER

5—10 p.m.

## BAKERY

*Daily homemade breads,  
muffins, cakes, pies, etc.*

## ICE CREAM & SODA FOUNTAIN

*Fred & Freya Hemley  
PROPRIETORS*

*Bring your  
own bottle  
of wine or beer!*

ROUTE 6A, NORTH TRURO

4 8 7 - 9 4 7 3

— AMPLE PARKING —

Front Street  
a restaurant

One of Provincetown's most innovative  
Continental Cuisines and extensive wine lists.

Chef and owner Donna Aliperti  
invites you to share an  
evening of intimate dining in a  
casual, elegant atmosphere.

RESTAURANT 'TIL 11 PM

BAR 'TIL 1 PM

230 Commercial Street

Provincetown

RESERVATIONS SUGGESTED

487-9715

WINE SPECTATOR  
"Award of Excellence"

# Martin House

— FOOD & DRINK —

Five fireplaced dining rooms in an 18th century Captain's House  
with water views and unparalleled ambience . . .

## Breakfast 9-1

featuring fresh baked goods, home-made granola & waffles,  
unique egg presentations, fresh juices, and espresso served on  
our flowering terrace a few yards from Provincetown Harbor.

## Dinner from 6:00

specializing in fresh, local seafood and vegetarian cuisine and  
featuring duck, pork, free-range chicken, Angus beef  
and native lamb, reasonably priced and elegantly served.

OPEN YEAR-ROUND

157 Commercial St., Provincetown  
in the West End, next to the Boatslip

•  
487-1327

RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

— East End —

### PEPE'S • 487-0670 • Seasonal

Owned and operated by the Berg family, Pepe's this year celebrates its 27th season of serving gourmet seafood—including bouillabaisse, lobster and Portuguese dishes—plus other specialties such as Steak Budapest. Pepe's romantic atmosphere, European flair and beachfront location makes this a special place to visit. Enjoy brunch or lunch on the upstairs deck overlooking the bay. Open for lunch and dinner.

### THE MEWS • 487-1500 • Open all year

The Mews, now in its second season in this delightful waterfront location in the East End, continues its fine tradition of serving excellent food in elegant surroundings. Enjoy great views from the dining room and upstairs deck overlooking the beach. This year, the new Cafe Mews offers a more casual menu featuring small pizzas, pasta, and roasted chicken. The Mews is situated in Provincetown's renowned gallery district; browse among through the galleries after dinner, most places are open until 11:00 p.m. in season.

### CIRO'S • 487-0049 • Open all year

Provincetown's best known restaurant, a romantic wine cellar serving an extensive menu of gourmet Northern Italian specialties. Enjoy dinner amid the worn flagstones and straw Chianti bottles downstairs, or cocktails upstairs in the intimate candlelit lounge, accompanied by operatic arias. Owned and managed by the Cozzi family. Reservations are essential in season and weekends off-season. Down the alley at Kiley Court in the center of the gallery district.



"Wonderfully imaginative..."

So said the New York Times. "The Best!" said the Boston Globe. "Inspiring," said Edouard Manet. Fifty savory selections unlike anything you've ever tasted. Luncheon on the grass or in P'town, Falmouth, Orleans, Wellfleet, Brewster, Eastham, Hyannis, Dennis!

## Harborview Dining at the Provincetown Inn

### FULL DINNERS

**\$12.95**

served daily 6 to 9 p.m.

#### — APPETIZER —

Clam Chowder or Soup du Jour

#### — DINNER —

Served with Bread Basket & Garden Fresh Salad

Black Diamond Steak

Roast Prime Rib au jus

Chicken Florentine

Chicken Parmesan

Blackened Swordfish

Broiled Scrod

Eggplant Parmesan

Boiled Native Lobster (\$2.05 surcharge)

Baked Stuffed Shrimp (\$2.05 surcharge)

#### — DESSERT & COFFEE —

Visit our Lounge with draft beer,  
large-screen cable TV, pool table,  
Foos Ball, and board & video games

ON THE WATER  
AT 1 COMMERCIAL STREET  
487-9500 • FREE PARKING

**THE FLAGSHIP** • 487-4200 • Seasonal  
Established in 1931, the Flagship is one of Provincetown's oldest restaurants. Serving fresh local seafood in the new England tradition in an atmosphere that seems haunted by Provincetown's nautical past, it's no wonder the Flagship is one of the East End's favorite restaurant. This is the third season under the ownership and management of Napi and Moe Van Dereck. Right on the beach near the Art Association, there's a lively bar scene at night with great cocktails, jazz and folk music.

**PUCCI'S** • 487-1964 • Seasonal  
A delightful little cafe right on the beach in the East End serving a wide variety of snacks, appetizers, and main meals throughout the day until 12:30 a.m. The specialty is Pucci's exceptional Buffalo chicken wings, better than any other; also available are char-broiled burgers, Mexican specialties, salads, sandwiches, and fresh seafood. The atmosphere is friendly, casual and relaxed and prices are moderate. Drop by any time for wings and a beer, or a cocktail and a plate of appetizers. The bar is a lively meeting place for East-Enders.

**BASIL'S** • 487-3368 • Open most of the year  
Newly refurbished, Basil's serves breakfast, lunch and dinner in a cozy, traditional New England atmosphere. Fresh seafood and char-broiled prime meats are a specialty, accompanied by selections from an excellent salad bar. Casual atmosphere, friendly service, and moderate prices. Early dinner specials—served 5-7 p.m.—are an excellent value. Always plenty of parking.



### HARBORSIDE RESTAURANT AND BAR

*Enjoy our waterfront enclosed deck with a spectacular view of the harbor from Provincetown's East End.*

OPEN DAILY FROM 11:00 AM

539 COMMERCIAL STREET • PROVINCETOWN • 487-1964



"Best Fine Dining—Outer Cape"  
*Cape Cod Life* People's Choice Award

Fine dining in a relaxed and elegant atmosphere

Native Seafood, Lamb & Duckling Specialties

349-6535

Casual dining and live entertainment in the  
**Tavern Room Restaurant**

"Best Jazz Room—Outer Cape"  
*Cape Cod Life* People's Choice Award

349-7369

"Wellfleet's Inn Place To Be"

East Main Street • Wellfleet • Mass. 02667

# ADRIAN'S

AT THE OUTER REACH



*Join us and enjoy unique and innovative food, spectacular waterviews and sunsets. Dine inside or on our outdoor deck overlooking Cape Cod Bay.*

### GOURMET BREAKFAST

8:00 am—12:00 noon (1:00 pm Sat. & Sun.)

Voted "Best Breakfast—Outer Cape"—CAPE COD LIFE

### DINNER

5:30—10:00 pm

Specializing in regional Italian cuisine. Appetizers, salads, pasta dishes, wood-fired brick oven pizzas and entrees. "Best Pizza"—BOSTON MAGAZINE

### — TAKE OUT AVAILABLE —

Featuring original artwork by local artists

AMPLE FREE PARKING

Route 6 • North Truro • 487-4360 • 5 minutes from Provincetown

**Truro****PAPARAZZI** • 487-2658 • Seasonal

Just across the North Truro border at Beach Point you'll find this informal beach-side restaurant famous for its prime rib, lobster and rib and seafood combos. All entrees include Chef's soup and salad bar with a special menu for juniors and seniors. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner; all menu items available for take-out. Friendly family atmosphere with moderate prices. Ample parking.

**ADRIAN'S** • 487-4360 • Seasonal

This is Adrian's second season at the Outer Reach Resort, spectacularly located on a bluff overlooking Cape Cod Bay, just five minutes from Provincetown. This warm and cozy chef-owned restaurant serves innovative and creative food using the finest ingredients available. Try wood-fired brick oven gourmet pizza, grilled meats and fish, bountiful breakfasts, or regional Italian appetizers and pastas. Desserts are baked on the premises. Dine on the outdoor deck overlooking the Bay. Always ample parking.

**BABE'S**

Promising to be THE place to go this summer. The first year for Fred Hemley—former chef at Ciro's—and his wife Freya, who have retained the delightfully dated flavor of this popular breakfast place and have a dinner menu, which should be excellent. They have retained the real old-fashioned ice cream/soda fountain and added a bakery for breads, muffins, cakes and pies made fresh daily. Just a few minutes from Provincetown on Route 6A, and there's always plenty of parking!

**BLACKSMITH SHOP** • 349-6554 • Seasonal

Located near the banks of the Pamet River in Truro Center, the Blacksmith Shop is a charming restaurant serving fine food amid a unique collection of hand-painted doll houses and folk art. Chef Warren Falkenburg serves a diverse selection of inventive dishes, including vegetarian and fresh seafood specialties. A popular meeting place for local residents and summer visitors. Plenty of parking.

**Wellfleet****AESOP'S TABLES** • 349-6450 • Seasonal

In Wellfleet, next to Town Hall. Once the summer mansion of a Massachusetts governor, Aesop's Tables has earned a reputation for fresh native food exquisitely prepared and artfully presented. Savor fresh, plump Wellfleet oysters, fresh seafood caught daily, quality meats, and fresh vegetables, herbs and flowers from Aesop's own gardens. Extensive and all-inclusive Sunday Brunch Buffet in season. Upstairs, try the cozy bar for appetizers, "deadly desserts," fine spirits and live jazz twice weekly, or the "Tavern on the Terrace" for *al fresco* imbibing and nibbling.

**SWEET SEASONS** • 349-6535 • Seasonal

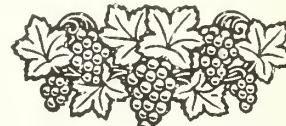
The Inn at Duck Creek is a delightful bucolic setting for this charming restaurant, complete with picturesque duck pond. Imaginative cooking and an elegant summery atmosphere make Sweet Seasons a special place to visit. The popular Tavern upstairs features lighter fare and live entertainment.

**CAPTAIN HIGGINS SEAFOOD****RESTAURANT** • 349-6027

On the Town Pier right next to the Wellfleet Harbor Actors' Theater—enjoy dinner here before the show. Featuring a wide selection of fresh seafood, raw bar, children's menu, and extensive wine list. Casual atmosphere, efficient service, and a great location overlooking Wellfleet Harbor, with a large deck for outdoor dining.

**Brewster****CHILLINGSWORTH** • 896-3640 • Seasonal

Chillingsworth is regarded as the finest restaurant on the Cape, and is well worth a visit to sample its fine cuisine in intimate dining rooms amid exquisite antiques. Also serving a casual Greenhouse luncheon and brunch, and upscale Bistro Menu in the bar nightly. Exceptional wine list.



**On Display:  
the mixed media collages of  
Kim Victoria Kettler**

*Aesop's Tables*  
*artful dining & fine spirits*

★★★ Mobil Travel Guide

private parties accommodated

Main Street — 349-6450 — May to October  
next to Town Hall in the heart of Wellfleet Center

**Chillingsworth**

## RESTAURANT and INN

Casual Greenhouse  
Luncheon & Brunch

Elegant Dinner

Unique Accommodations

... plus an upscale Bistro Menu  
in the bar nightly

"... a growing number of national critics rank it with the best in the United States. This is a very special place, not to be missed if you're anywhere within a hundred miles . . ."

ESQUIRE MAGAZINE

"Chillingsworth in Brewster is regarded as the best restaurant on the Cape . . ."

NEW YORK TIMES

CONTEMPORARY FRENCH CUISINE  
FINE WINES & COCKTAILS

GAULT MILLAU "The Best of New England"  
GOURMET MAGAZINE, April 1993  
Distinguished Restaurants of North America '93  
MOBIL GUIDE ★★★★

Route 6 A, Brewster • For schedule,  
reservations & information: (508) 896-3640

# BETTY BODIAN

## A RETROSPECTIVE



ANNUNCIATION 1992 30" x 30" acrylic

AUGUST 6 – 26, 1994

**GALLERY ZHOUF**  
Route 6 P.O. Box 933  
Wellfleet, MA 02667  
(508) 349 – 9898



# Fine White Line: The Tradition Continues

K  
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*Heidi's Garden*

Kathi Smith

## James R. Bakker

236 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02116  
Telephone (617) 262-8020 • Facsimile (617) 262-8019

Actively  
Buying and  
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ALICE C. BROWNE  
ADA GILMORE CHAFFEE  
OLIVER CHAFFEE  
MARY JENKS COULTER  
WILLIAM EVAUL  
CHARLES HAWTHORNE  
EDNA BOIES HOPKINS  
OTTO KARL KNATHS  
BLANCHE LAZZELL  
DOROTHY LOEB  
TOD LINDENMUTH  
ETHEL MARS  
ANGELE E. MYRER  
B.J.O. NORDFELDT  
MARGARET PATTERSON  
ELLEN RAVENSCROFT  
BERTHA M.T. RIED  
FLORA SCHOFIELD  
KATHI SMITH  
MAUDE SQUIRE  
GRACE MARTIN TAYLOR  
FEROL S. WARTHEN  
AGNES WEINRICH  
MARGUERITE ZORACH  
WILLIAM ZORACH  
and others